OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

25 YEARS OF CRASH

OLIVER FREY AND ROGER KEAN ON STARTING A MAGAZINE REVOLUTION



AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | …DO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | …OBILE

IN THE CHAIR…
PETER MOLYNEUX
THE HEAD OF BULLFROG LOOKS BACK AT HIS CAREER

AFTER BURNER
BLAST OFF WITH SEGA'S HIT COIN-OP

THE BIG FEATURE
SID SINGS
CELEBRATING THE WORLD'S GREATEST 8-BIT MUSIC CHIP

A MOMENT WITH…
JEFF MINTER
FIND OUT WHAT THE YAK THINKS ABOUT TODAY'S VIDEOGAMES



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

PLAYSTATION
HOW SONY'S CONSOLE CHANGED THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY

YIE AR KUNG-FU
KONAMI'S FIRST ONE-ON-ONE FIGHTER AND STILL THE BEST IT'S EVER MADE

TOEJAM & EARL
BEHIND THE SCENES OF SEGA'S QUIRKIEST 'JAMMIN' VIDEOGAME

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PLAYSTATION GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Oof, this is a tough one. I'm going for *Vagrant Story*. A superb RPG from Square that put even its *Final Fantasy* series to shame. Now where's the sequel, eh?

Expertise:
Juggling a wife, two beautiful girls and **Retro Gamer**

Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Freedom Unite

Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT

Tough one, but I'd have to hand it to *Rapid Reload* (aka *Gunner's Heaven*) for brazenly plagiarising *Gunstar Heroes* and then actually improving on Treasure's classic in many ways.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
Assassin's Creed II

Favourite game of all time:
Assassin's Creed II



JASON KELK

Probably *Gekioh: Shooting King*, with at least a quarter of that time playing in slow mode. One package but lots of variety.

Expertise:
What used to be called public-domain software

Currently playing:
Kernal's Chaos (still)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

I hugely enjoyed, aside from the hideous last level, the first *Driver*, which was the logical update to *Turbo Esprit* I'd been waiting for since 1986.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control

Currently playing:
Lucky Coins

Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



PAUL DRURY

I can't decide between the musical majesty of *Vib Ribbon* and the inspired lunacy of *Bishi Bashi Special*.

Expertise:
8K RAM Packs

Currently playing:
Wii Fit Plus

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



DAVID CROOKES

Silent Hill. It simply oozed atmosphere, chilled the blood and dragged me to its hell. *Ridge Racer* was cool too.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
Modern Warfare 2

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



IAIN LEE

The amazing *Vib Ribbon*, without a shadow of a doubt.

Expertise:
Pretending to be American while playing on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
I've been sucked into the hype machine and been playing *Modern Warfare 2*.

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Model B version)



PAUL DAVIES

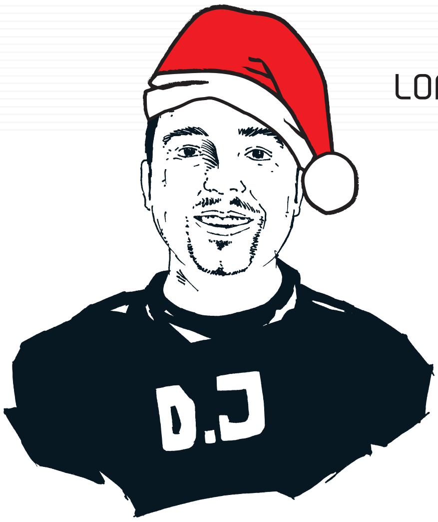
I'm going to be incredibly original and opt for Square's wonderful *Final Fantasy VII*.

Expertise:
Banging my head against brick walls

Currently playing:
Pac-Man, *Modern Warfare 2*

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N' Ghosts

LOADING...



Greetings, dear readers, and welcome to another issue of your favourite gaming magazine. We're approaching the end of the year and Christmas is just around the corner, so we've loaded up the current issue with a huge number of fantastic retro gifts, cleverly disguised as features.

Christmas is the time of miracles, so we've used this issue to cover some of the many requests from the past year. Easily one of the most exhaustive features this issue is Craig Grannell's amazing roundtable chat with no less than 12 C64 SID composers, including Rob Hubbard, Reyn Ouwehand, Chris Huelsbeck and more. Spectrum fans are also well catered for, as I travelled to Ludlow and caught up with Oliver Frey, Roger Kean and Matthew Uffindell to celebrate 25 years of *Crash* magazine.

A personal treat for myself is a lengthy interview with Microsoft's Peter Molyneux. It's taken us three years and many conflicting schedules to pull this off, but I honestly believe it's one of the best interviews you'll ever read about him – and with not a single mention of Project Natal! Add an in-depth feature on our glorious cover game *After Burner*, a massive guide to DOS gaming and a behind-the-scenes look at *ToeJam & Earl* and the end result is a fantastic selection of goodies that will keep you going well into the new year.





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» **Load 71** Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

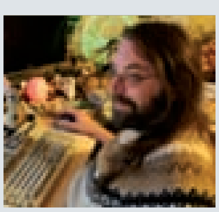
RETRO REVIVALS

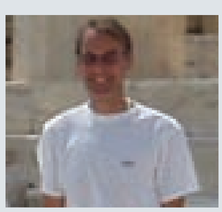






In the hot seat this month…





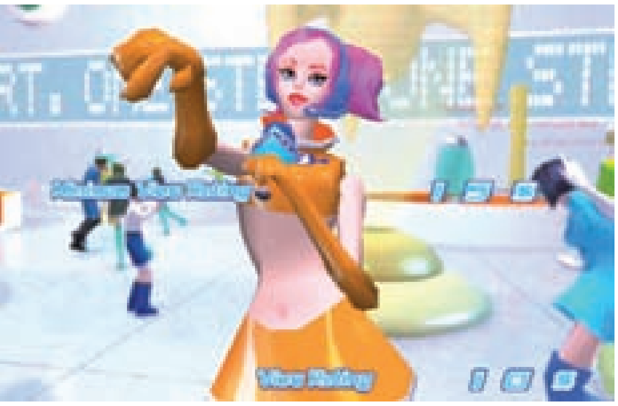






"Remains fantastically refreshing to play"

Darran Jones



80 Classic Game

Join Darran Jones as he hooks up with *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala and revisits one of the funkiest rhythm-action games ever made

ESSENTIALS

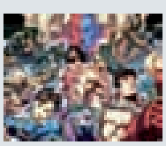
RETRO RATED

38 A BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO DOS

Before Windows there was DOS. Join us as we look back at the history and games that made up the early PC gaming scene

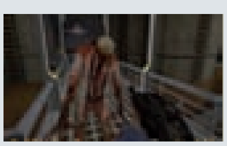


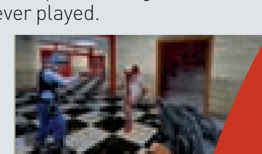
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



24 HALF-LIFE

Brandy Bantz explains why Valve's first-person shooter is one of the best examples of the genre that he's ever played.





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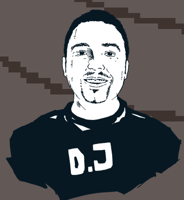
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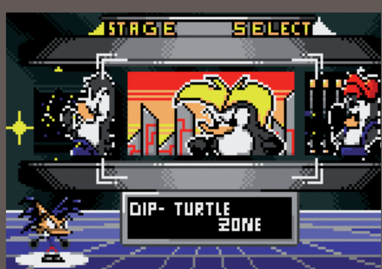
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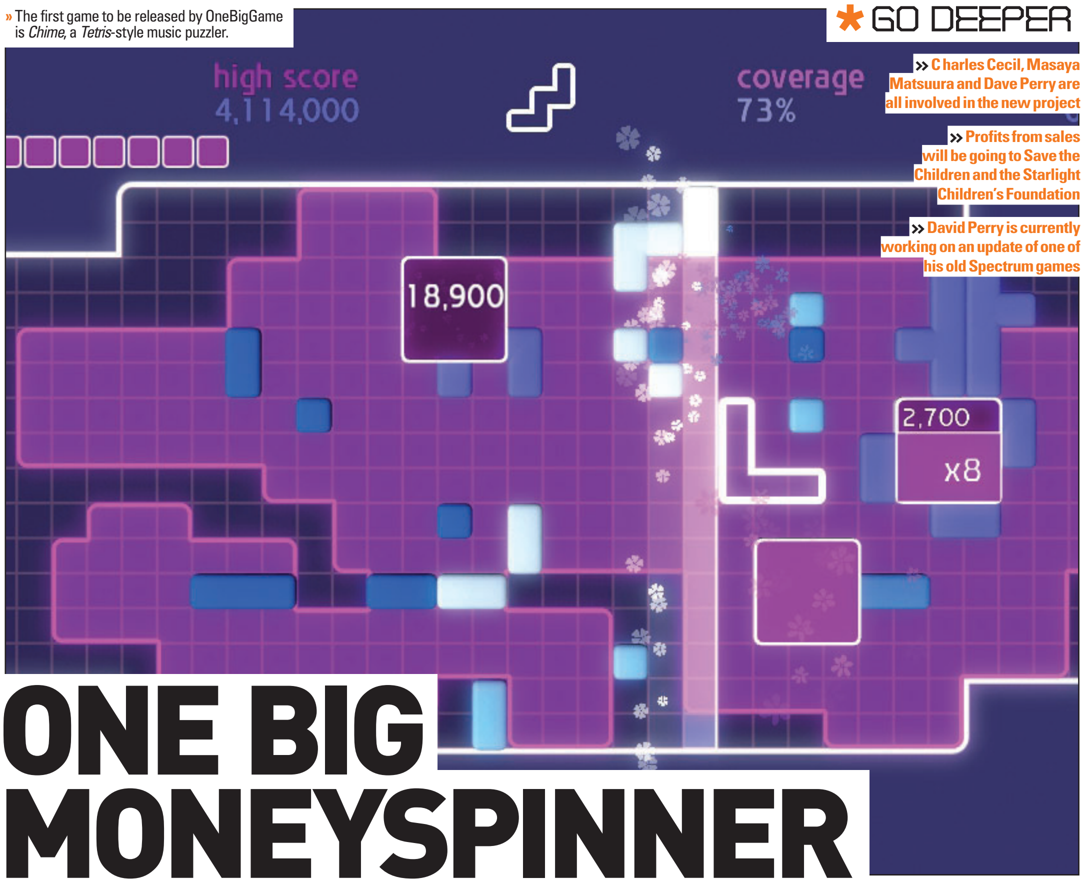
» GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



» I'm getting quite excited about the recent news about OneBigGame, and not just because some of my favourite developers are involved. After all, who wouldn't start getting excited about a project that will be seeing all its profits go to two very good causes?

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» The first game to be released by OneBigGame is *Chime*, a *Tetris*-style music puzzler.

GO DEEPER

» Charles Cecil, Masaya Matsuura and Dave Perry are all involved in the new project

» Profits from sales will be going to Save the Children and the Starlight Children's Foundation

» David Perry is currently working on an update of one of his old Spectrum games

ONE BIG MONEYSPINNER

GAMING LEGENDS ARE QUEUING UP TO GIVE TODAY'S CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUTTON BASH, AS DAVID CROOKES REPORTS

What would the world be like without high concept? Former PR manager Martin de Ronde has been flying around the world these past two years, trying to encourage gaming developers to sign up to an ambitious project – one that will see them creating an assortment of games to make money for charity. And how can it be summed up? Simple. As "Band Aid for games". Once uttered, the whole thing becomes rather exciting.

Martin does not attempt to hide the influence that Bob Geldof has had on him. "Yes, we took the concept straight from Band Aid," he says. "It was a great idea back then and what we have done is apply that to videogames. But the end result is the same – we are raising money for charity and, in our case, 80 per cent of our profit will be given away."

Among those producing titles for OneBigGame is Charles Cecil, creator of the *Broken Sword* series. He is taking *Minesweeper*, giving it a polish, and re-releasing it as a fresh, up-to-date point-and-click in which you control a character negotiating a minefield. And as Charles is very much addicted to narratives, he has given the whole thing a back story.

"We're going to explain how those mines got there," he said. "This is not just going to be a game you open up and play without there being some sort of context. It may sound strange at first, but when Martin asked me to contribute to OneBigGame and said that there were going to be no creative constraints, we just decided to go for it."

Charles is working on the project with students in Holland, which has enabled him to keep costs low. Profits, therefore, will be much higher, giving more money to OneBigGame's two chosen charities: Save the Children and the Starlight Children's Foundation.

"We've really got going on this in the past year," he says. "The students produced a proof of concept and we were keen on one thing: to ensure that we did not mistakenly change the very thing that makes the game great in the first place."

The game, like so many of the 15 titles being published by the non-profit-making OneBigGame, will be created in Flash, with money coming

> "Band Aid was a great idea back then and what we have done is apply that to videogames"

Developer's Opinions

» So what exactly is OneBigGame about?



Martin de Ronde

RG: Tell us more about your motivation for OneBigGame…
MdR: I'd been involved in PR for some time, and I decided to try something new. After watching a documentary on the 20th anniversary of Band Aid, I had the idea to do the same with games.
RG: We take it the name suggests that it was going to be a single game at first?
MdR: It was. The original plan was to re-create Live Aid and bring all of these developers together. But the support we got was overwhelming and it offered the scope for lots of smaller games.
RG: How will people play them?
MdR: Most of the games will be in Flash. The others will be available on games consoles and the iPhone.



Masaya Matsuura

RG: Why did you decide to get involved?
MM: It's a wonderful idea and it allows me to be very creative and not confined by any restraints.
RG: Why is your game called *WINtA* (War Is Not The Answer)?
MM: I feel that there is too much violence. I think a videogame should not have guns or knives. They should not hurt people.
RG: Is this why you enjoy producing music games?
MM: Yes. They are a lot of fun and if you look at the Wii and at other music games you can see that people enjoy non-violent games.



David Perry

RG: Are you currently working on your Spectrum remake?
DP: Not at the moment. The team is busy with Gaikai, our new gaming streaming service, and it is taking up a lot of our time, but when it is finished, we will turn our attention to the game.
RG: Are you able to tell us what the game is?
DP: Not at the moment. Martin de Ronde is still trying to work out whether or not we are allowed to do it. If we can, then we'll announce it but if not, then we'll choose something else.
RG: Can you give us a hint?
DP: If you played a lot of Speccy games then I'm sure you will have heard of it, or maybe even played it.



» OneBigGame will be setting up an internet portal to allow gamers to play on the web.



» *Minesweeper* is one of the most played games in the world, but Charles Cecil feels it's time to give it an overhaul.

from advertising. Some of the titles, however, will find their way onto the iPhone and consoles as purchased games. "We're looking at the possibility of our *Minesweeper* game being made available on XBLA, PSN and WiiWare," says Charles.

OneBigGame allows the developers to retain their rights to the games they produce. They will, in essence, allow their games to be played for charity for a set period of time, after which they can produce sequels or premium versions and keep the profits for themselves. "But most of us will be allowing our games to be used for fundraising forever more," says Charles.

Earthworm Jim creator David Perry is also producing a game. David began his career with the ZX Spectrum, working on games including *Three Weeks In Paradise* and *Savage*, and he will be reviving a ZX Spectrum title, but he is keeping the details under wraps other than that it will be on the Wii. "We're keeping it quiet," he says, "just in case it can't be done. But if you played a lot of Speccy games then I'm sure you will have heard of it, or maybe even played it."

One other retro game creator to become involved with the OneBigGame initiative is Masaya Matsuura, the brains behind the PSone classic *PaRappa The Rapper*. He has announced that he is producing a rhythm-action game called *WINtA* for the iPhone. Although it's at the prototype stage, in the game – which stands for 'War Is Not The Answer' – gamers can use their own music with the software analysing the beats.

"I am very happy to be producing this game for charity," he says. "It is important for us to be able to use our creative minds for the benefit of others. I want *WINtA* to redefine rhythm games in the same way that *PaRappa* made music games popular."

Martin is certain that OneBigGame (**onebiggame.org**) will be a winner. The first game will be called *Chime*, in which players form blocks of music from *Tetris*-style shapes, and it is due out before Christmas. The others will be released when they are ready over the next year or two, with Charles' game being one of the first.

"I have been amazed at the feedback I have had from developers," says Martin. "We have some legendary developers who have been producing games for decades working hard to produce something special. It's good that they have that background in retro games because we are aiming at a casual audience and the simplicity of many older games was their major, mass-market attraction. We hope this will prove to be the case with OneBigGames' titles." ✱

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Will you be supporting OneBigGame?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

will2097
I'm not spending money on a game and PR for Dave Perry – and it's not even the bandana one! – on any old tat, whether it's for charity or not.

Rinoa
Maybe. It all depends on the games.

Antiriad2097
As always, if they are good games, I may buy them. If they are pants, I definitely will not.

Paranoid Marvin
Pop them all on a disc and make them compatible in XP and… yes. Yes I will.
What game is David Perry remaking? Here's hoping it's *Wriggler*!

TwoHeadedBoy
If they were combining those three projects into one big game, as the name would suggest. So a Speccy-inspired, rhythmic action-based, pointy-clicky *Minesweeper*? Yes. Yes please.

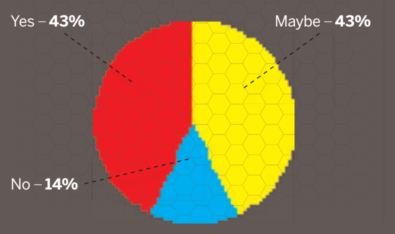
Romulous
If the games are in any way decent and at a good price where most of the money is going to charity then I would consider it. The only other game that I remember being for charity was on the Commodore Amiga, which I can't remember the name of. Was it *Sleepwalker*? I don't know. Unfortunately, like anything else software-related, the game was pirated and being sold for a couple of quid before it was even released.

thevulture
I am old enough to remember a few charity compilations on the C64. Soft Aid had one. The name escapes me, but I picked up one with *Skyfox* on it. Also more 'recently' there was the *Help Charity Compilation* on the PlayStation.

Darran
I'm really interested in this. I'd love it if Perry remade *Savage*, as that could look incredible on current-gen machines.

FORUM OPINION

Will you be supporting OneBigGame?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Meeting Mario

The thing I love about being a fan of retro gaming is that you can be a hardcore, anal freak who slathers over every detail from who designed the cover to who wrote the music for the end of the second level in some obscure Japanese release. You can also be at the other end of the spectrum and just enjoy reminiscing about games. Hell, you don't even need an old console. It's the nostalgia that keeps you coming back.

I personally fall somewhere between these two camps. I've got a load of old machines in my house. I don't really play them very often, but it makes me feel sexy and moist inside just knowing I have them. I don't have a clue who wrote the music for any game, and I think anyone who says you have to know that to be part of the 'club' is an utter dick. This is just about fun. That's how I see it, anyway.

Someone who has reminded me that videogames are all about having a good time is Charles Martinet. Some of you won't know who that is. Some of you will. And some of those that do know who that is will be saying that all of those of you who don't know who that is are idiots and should get out of here because you don't belong. Oh dear.

Charles has been the voice of Mario and various other Nintendo characters for over 20 years. I've been at a few events with him when he came over to the UK recently. I was a little nervous about meeting him; after all, what has the man who is famous for saying 'wahoo' really got to offer the world?

It turns out, quite a lot.

A nicer, less cynical man you couldn't hope to meet. He must have been asked to say "It's-a me, Mario" over a million times, and yet every time someone came up to him with awe in their eyes, he would happily chat away in his Mario or Luigi or whatever voice until they went away satisfied. (Unlike a grumpy Beach Boy I met at LAX recently, but that's a story for *Watchdog*!)

Getting the part of Mario after turning up uninvited to an audition is pretty cool. The first gig he did was some strange facial mapping thing where he wore electrodes, which copied his facial movements on a screen, a bit like an Italian Max Headroom. And hearing the other voices he contemplated for the part is a revealing glimpse into a parallel universe where Nintendo's favourite plumber almost ended up sounding like Danny DeVito on steroids.

I spent a couple of hours on a Tuesday afternoon playing *New Super Mario Bros Wii* with him. Throughout the game he could not stop doing the voices. And I mean ALL THE TIME. With anyone else this would have become highly irritating, but Charles has such a zest for life and gaming that it was a pure joy to share that moment with him.

Videogames. They're meant to be fun.

He would happily chat away in his Mario or Luigi or whatever voice until they went away satisfied

Best premiere you've attended? I tend not to go, as I prefer watching DVDs in the comfort of my home.



CLASSIC REVIEWER



BIO

Name:
Jonathan Davies
First Magazine:
Your Sinclair
Role:
Staff Writer
Favourite Game:
Too many
Favourite System:
GameCube

Favourite game?
Right now I'm playing far too much *Robokill*. But if we're talking 'ever', then definitely *GoldenEye*. No, wait… *Deus Ex*. *Advance Wars*. *StarCraft*?

Favourite system?
The GameCube, maybe? Dinky, discreetly efficient, the perfect controller, *Pikmin*, and no wobbly RAM pack.

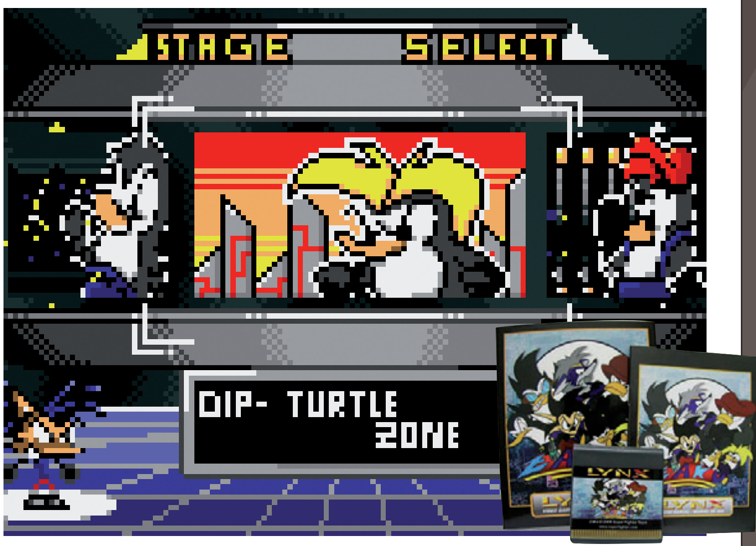
Best press trip you've been on?
I never got to go on that many. The few games junkets I did go on were considerably more 'leisurely' than trips for other industries I've covered, so they were ace fun but wreaked havoc with magazine schedules. And my health.

Best mag you've worked on?
If you really twisted my arm, I'd probably have to say *N64 Magazine*: a smashing bunch of people with magazinecraft in their blood.

Best person you've met in the videogame industry?
I've met hundreds of highly talented programmers, artists, level designers, producers, voice actors, all sorts. But I'm not sure. Maybe we should stage some sort of gigantic knockout tournament.

Magazine you would liked to have worked on?
I was an admirer of *Total!* but could never have betrayed *Super Play*. Maybe one of those Japanese magazines we used to get in the office. We could never understand a word of them but we'd spend hours squinting at the screenshots. I'd love to have worked on one of those.

How do you feel games magazines changed over the years?
They're harder to write for. You could get the measure of a Speccy game in about five minutes, but these days it can take weeks just to work out what's going on, let alone whether the thing's any good or not. Or maybe I'm just getting old. Bah.



ZAKU PANIC

NEW SHMUP RELEASED FOR ATARI LYNX

Independent publisher Super Fighter Team – of *Beggar Prince* fame – recently became the talk of the retro community with the release of *Zaku*, a brand new game for the Lynx. The side-scrolling shooter features wonderfully colourful cartoon visuals, runs at an impressive 60fps, and was inspired by titles like Air Zonk on the PC-Engine and Rocket Knight Adventures on the Mega Drive. Six years in development, Zaku has been given the usual 'deluxe' Super Fighter packaging, which includes an authentic 'curved-lip' Lynx-style plastic shell casing – the first time anyone has reproduced this outside Atari – and a 31-page instruction manual.

Super Fighter Team's president Brandon Cobb told **RG** how the project had come about: "A few years back, I took a gander at a very small demo by Osman Celimli. It was so impressive that I approached him to offer our publishing services. A friend of his had purchased *Beggar Prince*, and after seeing the overall quality of that product, Osman decided we were the right choice," he revealed.

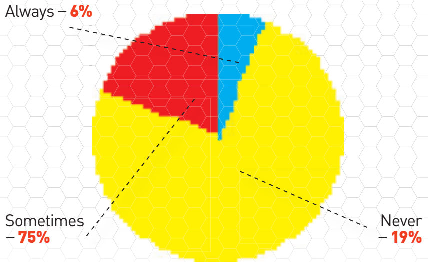
"It's great, everyone's real excited and energetic, posting their comments, photos, video snippets and the like. They realise and appreciate all the hard work put into the development, and what Super Fighter Team put into the production details. We're damned proud because the Lynx, for years, really deserved a great title like this. Now that people have it, their minds are blown and they're diving deep into the experience."

For details on how to purchase the game, head over to the official site at **www.zaku-lynx.com**. Expect a review very soon. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Do you buy homebrew games?



"I'd love to get into some MD homebrew – the only working retro gaming system I have – but only know of those two JRPGs, which is a genre I'm not really a fan of outside *Final Fantasy*" **– Supernaut**

"I do. Quite a few from Psytronik, namely *Joe Gunn*, *Knight 'N' Grail* and *Sub Hunter*. My most recent one was Jon Wells' conversion of *The Wild Bunch*" **– SexyWayne**

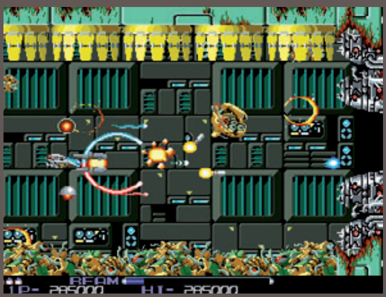
MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



Latest YouTube News

www.youtube/users/retrogamerdaz
It's been a quiet month due to cat vomit rendering Darran's laptop completely useless. Nevertheless, there are still some cool videos to look at, including a couple from when we visited Oliver Frey and Roger Kean, as well as a look back at the earlier history of *Batman* games and some truly dire Dreamcast titles. Oh, and check out Darran's PSPgo collection.



R-Type goes iPhone

DotEmu, the developer responsible for the recent iPhone port of MSX RPG *Golvellius*, has announced an upcoming collaboration with Irem on an official *R-Type* conversion. Though the iPhone's touch-screen interface hasn't always proven perfect for classic shooters, the likes of *Dropship* and *Space Invaders Infinity Gene* showed how well the genre can work, so fingers crossed for something special.



Vandal Hearts returns

One of the best-kept secrets of the PlayStation generation, the original *Vandal Hearts* was a stonkingly good tactical RPG with a near-perfect storyline, great characters and a superb soundtrack. After a ten-year absence, Konami is reviving the franchise with *Vandal Hearts: Flames Of Freedom*. The new game takes the form of a prequel and should be released this winter on PSN and XBLA.

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years



C&VG On A Good Day

Darran asked me to talk about *C&VG* this month. Hopefully you know what that is: *Computer & Video Games* magazine, that now exists as CVG.com.

I was lucky to work on *C&VG* as editor almost 15 years ago alongside a very talented bunch of lads not unlike the team Darran has on **RG**. The reason I know they're clever is that they've all moved on to great things. I almost said greater, but *C&VG* as it was back then has always seemed special. I should explain.

Our team got together roughly around the same time as the PlayStation and Saturn launched in the UK. The best arcades were still hugely exciting places to be. We were still waiting for Capcom to make *Street Fighter III*, let alone *IV*. 'Arcade perfect' conversions of *Street Fighter Alpha I* and *II* on the Saturn – not quite PlayStation: too long to load, missing animation, etc – were the talk of the lunchtime chippy. We played *Dynamite Headdy* after our nights out thinking games like this should rule the world. We listened to the *NiGHTS* soundtrack at 3am during deadline week… all week.

Without the internet to do the job for us, we enjoyed the responsibility of bringing the world's best games to the attention of UK gamers. What's big in Japan? What's hot in the US? We really wanted to know first so that we could pass on the fever ASAP. The first sighting of *Sonic The Fighters*, for example, delayed our on-sale date, literally holding the press. It was only one game, but so important to us! Prior to my first Christmas working on *C&VG*, my new role allowed me to be among the first in the world to play *Mario 64*. My art editor Jaime couldn't wait to hear all about it. When that game arrived in the office, along with the N64, it was chaos.

The three years between '95 and '98 were full of magic, to which we were so tuned in as a team. It was immediately obvious that Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun* shoot-'em-up for the Sega Saturn was phenomenal. Genuinely bewildering that the editor of *Edge* magazine, Jason Brookes, would think to phone me and ask what all the fuss was about. We must have looked like a right bunch of lunatics to our managers. Even the guys that we thought would love what we were doing could be strangely dismissive – I once asked Rare what they liked/disliked about the magazine so we could make it better. They said we were just a kids' magazine, so didn't read it. Now Rare is making nothing but kids' games. Ironically CVG.com is now more grown up.

Everyone has their era. Gaming-wise, this was mine. Not just professionally but as a crazy fan of so much new stuff arriving almost every week. Of course the magazine didn't happen all by itself – we were all too tired as proof – but I think all the lads would agree that without the amazing games there would have been nothing to work for.

We must have looked like a right bunch of lunatics to our managers

Lowest score you've given? Can't remember exactly, but it was somewhere around 15%. Probably for the box artwork.

REVOLUTIONARY

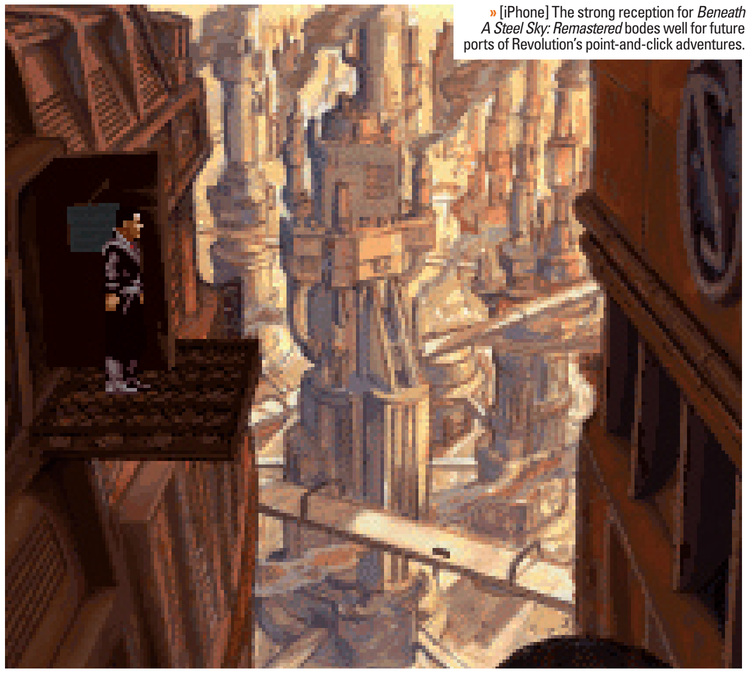
REVOLUTION ANNOUNCES NEW COLLABORATION WITH DAVE GIBBONS

Following the recent release of *Beneath A Steel Sky: Remastered,* an update of Revolution's classic sci-fi adventure for the iPhone, Charles Cecil has revealed that he is currently working with Watchmen artist Dave Gibbons on a new adventure. Gibbons famously collaborated with Revolution on the original PC/Amiga game, for which he helped design the game's intro, background graphics and characters, along with drawing the comic included in the package. The *Remastered* version, which features an upgraded interface and all-new animated cut-scenes by Gibbons, has now surpassed 20,000 sales on iTunes. Cecil takes an unusual stance for the industry regarding the game's success, claiming that emulation may well have raised the profile of the franchise after Revolution allowed the original game to be made freely available.

"It's been extraordinarily successful," he says. "Obviously people have been able to download it, and literally millions and millions of people have played it. That has meant that actually the brand is really well known now."

As for the new project, Revolution told us: "The project is still at a very early stage, so no details have been announced." However, speculation is rife on the possibility of a new *Steel Sky* adventure. "We have a number of ideas for premises and we honestly haven't decided which road we're going to go down, but I love writing and playing adventure games and that is what I'm going to stick to," Cecil told reporters at a recent gaming expo in October. With the profile of the franchise being at its highest since its 1994 debut, it would certainly make sense for the company to pursue something along the lines of a *Beneath A Steel Sky* sequel, especially given the fact that in February this year, Cecil remarked: "It's probably going to happen at some point. People are very passionate about it." ✱

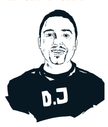




» [iPhone] The strong reception for *Beneath A Steel Sky: Remastered* bodes well for future ports of Revolution's point-and-click adventures.

✱ WHAT WE THINK

Darran



The combined talents of Revolution and Dave Gibbons' artwork has been a good match-up in the past, so I'll definitely be keeping an eye on their latest collaboration. Here's hoping that it's *Beneath A Steel Sky 2.*

Stuart



Personally, I hope this new game is a *BASS* sequel. The original is one of my favourite games, and the iPhone version is brilliant and certainly got me in the mood for a follow-up. Whatever the project turns out to be, I'm sure it's going to epic.

Ash



This is awesome news as far as I'm concerned. *Beneath A Steel Sky* is miles better than *Broken Sword,* in my opinion, and is a great example of what can be done when two artistic media converge.



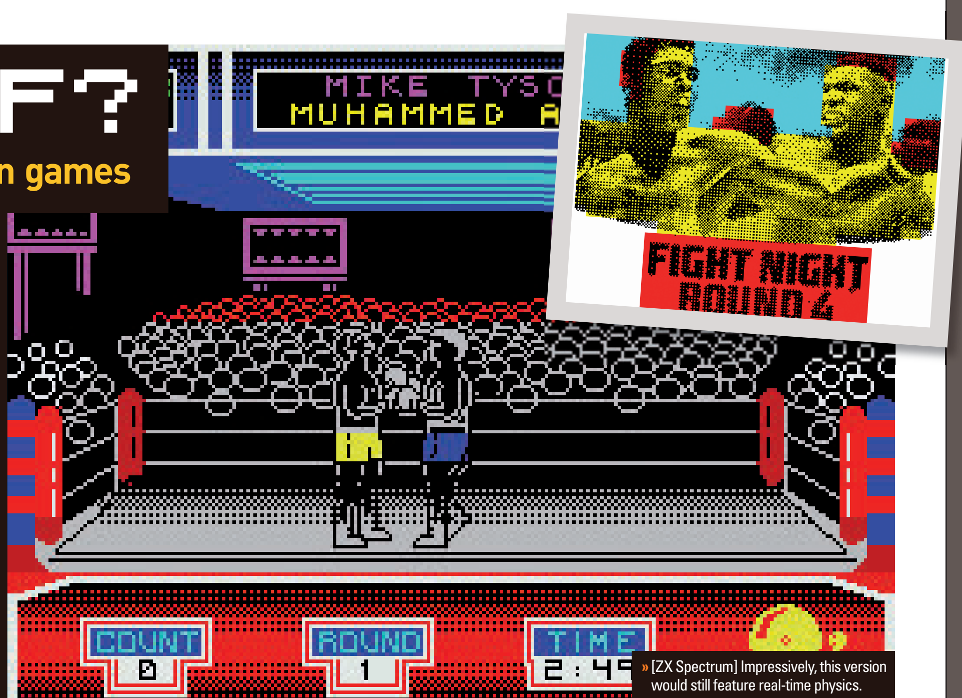
WHAT IF?

Your favourite next-gen games remade, retro style

Subject No 5

Fight Night Round 4

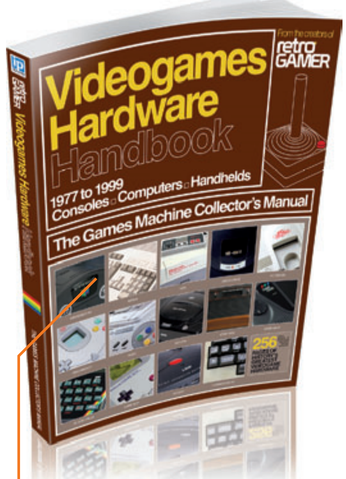
FUNNILY ENOUGH, WE still associate the name *Fight Night* with the old cartoon-style Accolade 'sim', which featured a roster of humorously named opponents like Dip Stick, Kid Castro and British Bulldog. We reckon EA's new franchise would be a perfect candidate for the Speccy – as long as it featured such characters as 'Ear-Bruiser' Tyson, 'Headbutt' Holyfield and George Foreman as 'The Beefmaster', preferably sporting some sort of natty trilby hat…



» [ZX Spectrum] Impressively, this version would still feature real-time physics.

Retro Booty

THE PERFECT RETRO GIFTS FOR ANY STOCKING



Videogames Hardware Handbook

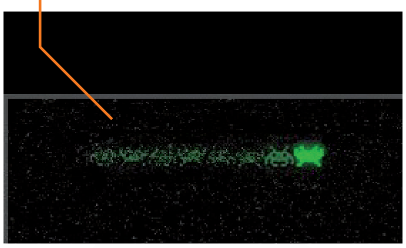
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Publisher:** Imagine Publishing
- **Buy it from:** www.imagineshop.co.uk

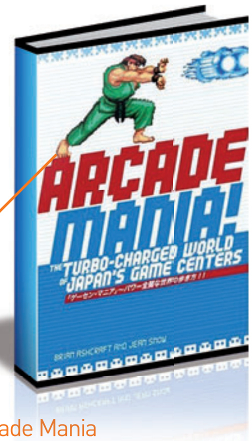
If you love reading through our monthly Retroinspections you'll find the following bookazine indispensable. The 256-page tome features 36 different machines ranging from the Atari 2600 to disappointments like Nintendo's Virtual Boy and NEC's PC FX. It's the perfect book for any coffee table.

Space Invaders Doormat

- **RRP:** £34.95
- **Manufacturer:** Illumatic
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

We think £34.95 is a bit pricey to spend on something that you basically just wipe your feet on – even if it is cool. We'd liken it to paying £34.95 for a spitting bucket that resembles a green *Mario* pipe, a loo brush that looks like Shadow the Hedgehog, or *Last Battle* toilet roll.





Arcade Mania

- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Kodansha International
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

This book, by Kotaku's Brian Ashcraft and contributor Jean Snow, offers an insightful and often funny look at the Japanese arcade scene. From the classic to the quirky, and everything in between, it's a fascinating book that includes some great photography too.

PC Engine GT

- **Price:** £80+
- **Manufacturer:** NEC
- **Buy it from:** www.ebay.co.uk

If we could choose just one handheld to treat ourselves to, it would be NEC's amazing portable PC-Engine. With its huge range of classic games, excellent screen and decent portability, it's the perfect system for those looking to splash a bit of cash. Just watch out for dead pixels when you're buying it.





Official Street Fighter IV Arcade Stick

- **RRP:** £149.99
- **Manufacturer:** Hori
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Yes it's nearly as expensive as the console you can play it on, but it you love fighters you need this stick. Made from the same components that appear in the original Street Fighter IV arcade machine, it's a truly beautiful stick and a very solid investment.

Super Mario Chess

- **RRP:** £42.99
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

Apparently this is the first and only chess set to feature the *Mario* characters, which we were surprised by. Despite coming a little late in Mario's career, some would say, it's a wonderful-looking chess board and a must for any retro gaming chess nut.



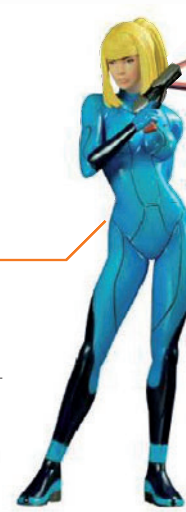
TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988

- **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
- **Author:** Brett Weiss
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



This follow-up to Weiss's equally excellent book, *Classic Home Video Games 1972-1984*, is a great tome of reference that contains reviews for every US-released game for the NES, Atari 7800 and Sega Master System. This makes it a must-own for any avid 8-bit collector, particularly those dwelling Stateside. With the book brimming with reviews and game information such as release date, developer, publisher, and even the number of players each game supports, there's very little stopping us from recommending it. If we had to find one criticism, it would be the somewhat bland choice of imagery that Weiss uses to dress the book up, which is basically just a selection of boring videogame box shots.



Metroid Prime Samus Figurine

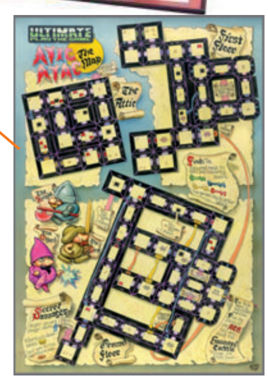
- **RRP:** £79.99
- **Manufacturer:** Nintendo
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

An exquisite-looking figurine of Nintendo's first lady, Samus Aran, who is seen here wearing her curvaceous Zero Suit from *Metroid Prime*. It's 9.5" in height and would make the ideal addition to any pervy Nintendo fan's game dungeon.

Oliver Frey Atic Atac Original Print

- **Price:** £400
- **Publisher:** Oliver Frey
- **Buy it from:** www.oliverfreyart.com

Oliver Frey's distinctive artwork has found a huge fan base, and now it's possible to hang a piece of history on your very own wall. Being huge Ultimate fans, we've had our eye on this gorgeous map for a while now. You may want to pick it up now, though, as once it's gone, this original print is gone forever.





Retro Duo NES/SNES Game System

- **RRP:** $49.99 (approx £30)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Yes, your eyes don't deceive you. This is a TV-based console that allows you to play NES and SNES games – but not both at the same time, as that would be stupid. We've yet to feel impressed by any of these budget consoles that find a release. Hopefully this is one of the better ones out there.



Astro Wars

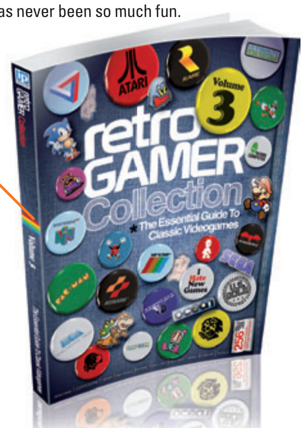
- **Price:** £50+ (boxed)
- **Publisher:** Grandstand
- **Buy it from:** www.ebay.co.uk

Christmas is a time of giving, so why not give yourself this truly excellent tabletop LCD? While you can pick it up unboxed for around £30, we'd go for the boxed version; mainly because you could then wrap it up and make out to your better half that it was given to you by an eccentric relative.

Retro Gamer Collection Vol 3

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Publisher:** Imagine Publishing
- **Buy it from:** www.imagineshop.co.uk

If you're still looking for the perfect gift for your loved one then pick them up the latest **Retro Gamer** bookazine. Filled with 256 pages of amazing features, they'll discover how *OutRun* was made, the history behind the PC-Engine and much, much more. Learning has never been so much fun.



Fatal Fury Cap

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Publisher:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Lower the odds of getting beaten up when walking down dark alleys at night by sporting this delectable *Fatal Fury* trucker's cap. It'll fool dangerous drunks and dim-witted thugs into thinking that you are actually Terry Bogard. Just ask Darran.



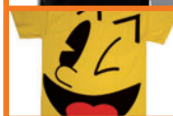
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



01 Gauntlet
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Pac-Man
- **RRP:** £11.95
- **Manufacturer:** Namco
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

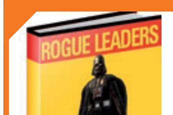


04 Street Fighter II
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Bravado
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



05 Sonic The Hedgehog
- **RRP:** £11.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



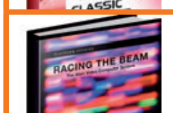
01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
- **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Porn & Pong
- **RRP:** £10.99
- **Publisher:** Feral House
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



03 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988
- **RRP:** £8.99 ■ **Publisher:** Random House Trade ■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

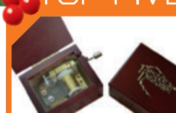


04 Racing The Beam
- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Publisher:** MIT Press
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Game Over
- **RRP:** £22.14
- **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group Inc
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Panzer Dragoon Music Box
- **RRP:** £29.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.videogameimports.com



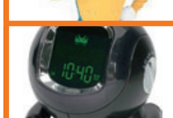
02 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
- **RRP:** $14.99 (£9.23 approx)
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



03 Tetris TV Game
- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Manufacturer:** Unknown
- **Buy it from:** www.play.com



04 Sonic Costume
- **RRP:** £34.94
- **Manufacturer:** Heroes For Kids
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Space Invaders Clock
- **RRP:** $80
- **Manufacturer:** Taito
- **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



* A MOMENT WITH...

Jeff Minter

Every issue, we put an industry legend in the hot seat. This month we got to sit down with Llamasoft's Jeff Minter

Who is Jeff Minter?

He's an 8-bit legend who made his mark thanks to his tightly designed games, love of llamas and camels and eclectic use of sound. Commonly known as YAK, he's still making games today, with the excellent *Gridrunner Revolution* being his latest offering.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers and why?
Gridrunner Revolution is the most accessible game I've done for ages and serves, I think, as a good way into the Llamasoft world-o'-psychedelia without being too off-putting. I know some people found *Space Giraffe* to be a little too off-world, but from the feedback we've been getting *Gridrunner Revolution* seems to hit a good sweet spot between accessibility and neurosensory overload. Plus it has fluffy sheepies!

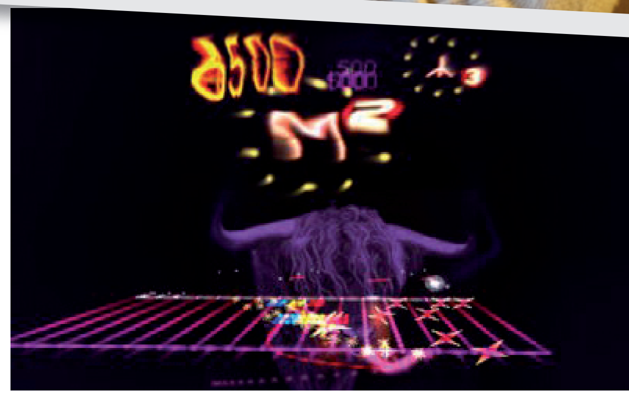
What is your proudest memory?
Probably the warm response we received when we released *Llamatron* as shareware. It was quite a new idea back then and people really liked that we trusted them to pay if they actually liked the game. We got a great response at a time when we really needed it, along with loads of goodwill, with hundreds of people sending us letters thanking us for the game. It proper warms my cockles just thinking about it.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Seeing it through to the end. When a project can span a year or more, keeping the momentum going can be a difficult thing. Keeping the faith and soldiering on until the end, trusting that you'll polish the game up along the way, can be a lot harder than any individual programming challenge.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
If I had to pick one I'd probably say Eugene Jarvis, who produced a set of classic games that exemplified distinctive design, tough challenge and interesting gameplay. They were a huge influence on me and I still love them to this day. Plus Eugene is a really nice guy. I met him some years ago and he was just a great guy to hang out with and to talk to.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
Fondly. As things that gave people a bit of fun and made them smile.

Which games do you wish you'd made?
Defender, *Stargate*, *Robotron*, *Star Raiders* and *Tempest*, but you'd have to be truly godly to come up with all those great games.



» [Xbox 360] *Space Giraffe* was an excellent twist on *Tempest*. We awarded it 98%.

What opportunities has making games given you?
To have fun doing work I really enjoy, to learn a crap load of things along the way, and to experiment with things like music visualisation and procedural graphics.

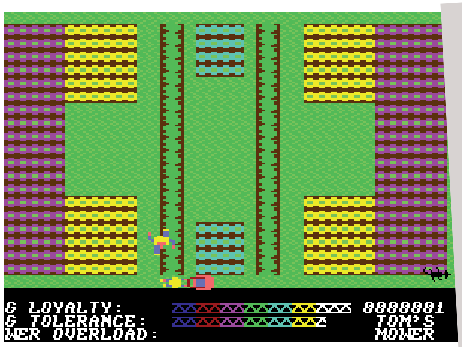
What's your darkest memory?
Probably working on *Defender 2000*. Not because of the game, but because my dad had terminal cancer and I was living 6,000 miles away and quite helpless to do anything to make things any better.

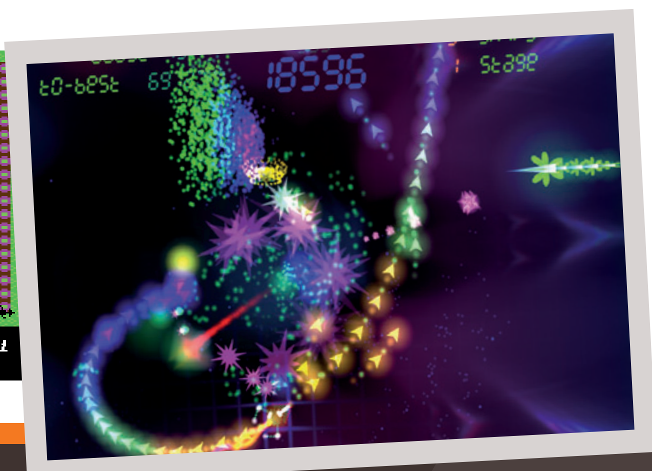
And your best?
So many good ones. Taking the winner of the *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* competition, along with my mum and dad, on a trip to ride a camel round the pyramids, flying there and back on Concorde – how ace was that? Hiring the London Planetarium to do a *Trip-A-Tron* show was awesome. Hanging out with friends, playing games, going to computer shows… Top times.

Can you share any industry anecdotes?
Lube me up with a few beers when I come down and then we'll talk.

How has the industry changed?
It's a proper industry now as opposed to a bunch of lads all doing stuff for the fun of it, making a living at it and having a damn good time, as it was in the early days. Hopefully there's room for individuals and small teams to exist even now in the indie scene. *

> **"It proper warms my cockles just thinking about the response to Llamatron"**





retrodiary

11 December–7 January

» A month of retro events both past and present



11 December 1989
■ A new coin-op game is released and awaiting your bagful of 10p coins… the scrolling slash fest that is *Golden Axe*.



11 December 1998
■ Nintendo 64 gamers were in for a treat with the European release of the long-awaited *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*.



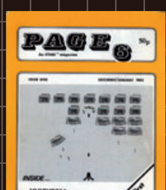
12 December 2004
■ Sony's handheld system, the PSP, hits the streets of Japan for the first time.



14 December 1995
■ Nintendo and Rare collaborate again to produce *Donkey Kong Country 2* on the SNES. *DKC3* followed a year later…



17 December 1987
■ Japan led the way with the debut of another seminal videogame character, with *Mega Man* arriving on the Famicom.



16 December 1982
■ The first issue of the UK's first Atari-specific magazine, *Page 6*, was available.



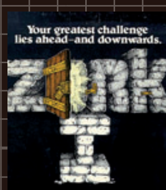
15 December 1989
■ The coin-op classic *Final Fight* is released in arcades, brought to you by the team that would later create *Street Fighter II*.



14 December 1996
■ The long-awaited Nintendo 64 update to the SNES gaming legend that is *Super Mario Kart* was finally released.



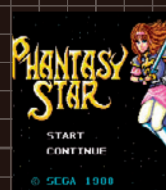
18 December 1987
■ The first *Final Fantasy* game appears in Japan, and also saves the developer, Square, from going bankrupt.



19 December 1980
■ Infocom releases its first *Zork* text adventure game on the IBM PC.



19 December 1986
■ *Knight Lore* is released on the Japan-only Famicom Disk System. Looks a bit weird too…



20 December 1987
■ The first game in the classic RPG series *Phantasy Star* is released in Japan on the Master System.



23 December 1997
■ Another first for Japan as the driving game *Gran Turismo* was released on the PS, marking its worldwide debut.



23 December 1994
■ NEC PC-FX, the next generation PC-Engine, is released in Japan. It didn't leave much time to get one in for Christmas…



22 December 2000
■ The developer of *Resident Evil* brought you a new survival videogame, *Dino Crisis*, receiving its official UK release.



20 December 2001
■ The last official N64 game was released in Japan. The title in question? Hudson's *Bomberman 64*.



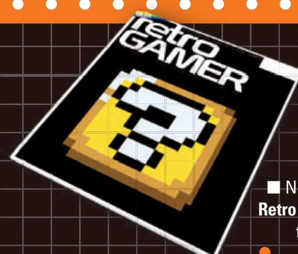
29 December 1999
■ *Shenmue*, the superb adventure from Sega, made its first appearance in Japan on the Dreamcast.



30 December 2000
■ Bandai's latest handheld console, the WonderSwan Color, makes its worldwide debut. It supersedes the earlier model.



31 December 1993
■ The last day of 1993 saw Julian Gollop's excellent first entry in the *X-Com* series get released. Good times.



07 Jan 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

Back to the Eighties

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1987



NOVEMBER 1987 – Jack's Back, Wizball too, Singleton's got a Dark Sceptre, Ocean has Match Day II, Thundercats ho, and Werewolves Of London finally arrives. Richard Burton is the hairy-handed gent who ran amok in Kent…



» [Amstrad CPC] Warren Zevon's song had nothing to do with this game, unfortunately. Aahooo!



» [Spectrum] More nappy-filled fun with the well-travelled baby from Gremlin.



» [Spectrum] Mumm-Ra, Lion-O, Panthro, Cheetara – what's not to like? A surprisingly good tie-in game.

New to newsagents this month was *Commodore Disk User*, a niche magazine in an already niche market. The publisher, Argus Press, included a 5.25" disk of utilities and demos in the hope that it would find support. Rather surprisingly, it did, particularly considering how drab and text-heavy the layout of the magazine was.

Gremlin Graphics revealed that it was bringing back its baby-faced cash cow for another outing. *Jack The Nipper* sold very well first time around, so a sequel was always likely to be on the cards. *Jack The Nipper II: In Coconut Capers* was more of the same arcade adventuring we'd come to know and love when it was released on the CPC, Spectrum and C64 just before Christmas and again, it did well for Gremlin.

Gremlin also had a game based on the *Pink Panther* cartoon under development. Would the game match the Pink Panther's guile, charm and quick wits? No. It was a top drawer stinker.

There was sure to be celebrations across the land with news of the impending release of the C64 classic *Wizball* for both the Atari ST and Amiga, thanks to a spot of self-promotion…



» *Commodore Disk User*: new out and chock full of all things disky. It was also text-heavy with a technical bent.

Peter Johnson, the coder behind the 16-bit conversions of *Arkanoid* for Imagine, thrust himself into Ocean's view when he sent it his own demo of *Wizball*. It liked what it saw and requested that he complete both the Atari ST and Amiga conversions. When the conversions eventually arrived around Christmas, the reaction was decidedly mixed, with the Amiga version looking like a straight Atari ST port. Sadly a missed opportunity…

Lucasfilm Games and Activision had news of a compilation comprising all their best bits on the Spectrum and C64 appearing soon. *The Prestige Collection* would contain just four games but all would blow your garish Christmas socks off. A crisp £10 note would net you *The Eidolon*, *Rescue On Fractalus*, *Ballblazer* and *Koronis Rift*. That's better than a Chocolate Orange…

Lords Of Midnight creator Mike Singleton declared that his next adventure game would be released on the Firebird label despite being developed by the Beyond team. Seeing *Dark Sceptre* released on any label was a surprise, as it was slowly slipping into gaming folklore for consistently being promoted but never appearing. Eventually the Spectrum version was released, with a CPC version following later.



» [C64] He really is a groovy cat and he's a gentleman, a scholar, but the game's a bit crap.

The game itself had you wandering the Islands of the Western Sea in search of the Dark Sceptre, a powerful weapon that needed to be destroyed. It also had impressively huge main characters who roamed the landscape, which consisted of an enormous number of locations for you to explore. A teeny bit like *Lords Of Midnight*, then? Not really, no…

Dark Sceptre was an excellent addition to Singleton's CV, and although sales weren't great, the graphics certainly were. A notable absence from that CV, however, was *Eye Of The Moon*, the third and final instalment of the *Lords Of Midnight* trilogy that Singleton had been promising to start work on once *Dark Sceptre* was completed. Regrettably, it was never begun…

Ocean Software was busy preparing a sumptuous feast of gaming for Christmas involving yet more coin-op conversions and the return of an old gaming favourite. It promised big things with its releases of *Combat School* and *Gryzor*, while its sister label, Imagine, had conversions of the SNK coin-



» [Spectrum] And with an open goal and the keeper beaten, Burton duly back-heels it out for a throw-in. Gah!

1987

NOVEMBER NEWS

November was not a happy month. 8 November saw 11 people killed when a bomb exploded during a Remembrance Day service in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. Over 60 others were injured during the blast, which showered masonry onto the crowd around the town's war memorial.

The IRA later admitted planting the bomb. Gerry Adams, the IRA's political voice at that time, formally apologised for the atrocity on Remembrance Day 1997. However, the bombing was later seen as a turning point in the peace process, with the IRA losing support around the world.



» *Innerspace* materialises in a cinema near you starring Short, Quaid, Ryan and the holographic Doctor from *Star Trek: Voyager.*

18 November saw further loss of life at King's Cross tube station in London when a machine room situated under a wooden escalator caught fire due to a discarded match. It also set the escalator ablaze, denying passengers an escape route.

By the time it was extinguished, 31 had died, with more injured. As a result, smoking and wooden escalators were phased out from the Underground.

27 November saw the UK premiere of *Innerspace*, a *Fantastic Voyage* for the Eighties. Meanwhile, America received the worldwide premiere of the tragically awful *Teen Wolf Too*, starring some actors, none of which were Michael J Fox.



» The King's Cross tube station blaze kills many in a terrible and tragic November.



» [Amiga] Although a reasonable conversion, the Amiga version of *Wizball* was something of a disappointment.

ops *Athena* and *Psycho Soldier* ready for the festive period. They didn't disappoint.

However, the main event, for Spectrum gamers at least, was the return of *Match Day*, with Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond once again at the helm.

Match Day II introduced more customisation, a better kicking system, and also the extremely frustrating kickometer, which invariably resulted in you back-heeling the ball with an open goal gaping in front of you. The reworking of the original was generally a success across the main 8-bit formats. However, the age-old *Match Day* bugbear of slowness reared its head again, with the 'action' sometimes resembling a slow-motion replay. Nevertheless, *Match Day II* was still worth the wait.



» [Amstrad CPC] Jewel collecting and cave exploration make this atmospheric monster-laden world an exciting place to be.

Eugene Evans, the teenage programming sensation – that was officially his middle name in the mid-Eighties, kind of – was back after the Imagine collapse. His *Bermuda Project* graphic adventure for Mirrorsoft found you investigating disappearances inside the Bermuda Triangle. You go there, your plane crashes and you end up on a mysterious island walking around endlessly with not a lot happening. Atari ST and Amiga owners weren't best pleased with this project…

The long-winded saga of *Werewolves Of London* by Viz Design was finally drawing to a close. Having originally intended to be released by Ariolasoft – only the Amstrad version was – until it suffered a sudden bout of liquidation, the game found itself in limbo. Mastertronic stepped in and rescued the Spectrum version, releasing both CPC and Spectrum editions together on its Flippy budget label and found that not only was it rather good, but it sold well too. Result.

Computer & Video Games' Game of the Month for November was Archer Maclean's *International Karate +* (System 3, C64), with the Hit brigade including *Hollywood Poker* (Diamond Software, Amiga), *Quedex* (Thalamus, C64), *Hysteria* (Software Projects, Spectrum), *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* (US Gold, Atari ST), *Renegade* (Imagine, Amstrad), *Sidewalk* (Infogrames, Atari ST), *Pirates!* (MicroProse, C64), *Backlash* (Novagen, Atari ST) and *Barbarian* (Palace Software, Atari ST).

Crash magazine only awarded one solitary Smash: *Thundercats* (Elite). Sword of Omens, give me sight beyond sight… and some decent Spectrum games…

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

CRASH



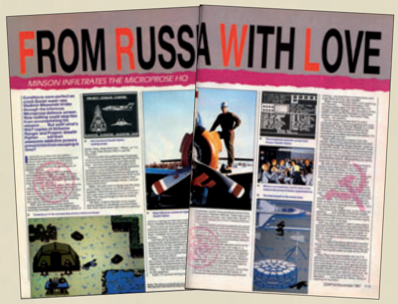
3D was the theme for this issue. A feature on 3D games highlighted the forthcoming Freescape game *Driller* plus a look back at early examples such as *Ant Attack*. There was also 3D content that could be viewed with the green/red cardboard glasses that came stuck to the front cover. Headache not included…



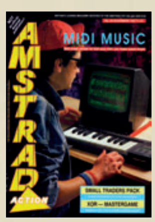
ZZAP!64



With two new flight sims due out soon, *Zzap!* toddled off to Gloucestershire to visit MicroProse HQ for a sneak peek at its two new offerings: *Airborne Ranger* and *Project Stealth Fighter*. Sadly no interviews with staff; just a preview of said games and a thumbs up for the pair.



AMSTRAD ACTION



AA's reviewing team gave the Mastergame top award to *Xor* by Logotron. It was a challenging puzzle game that saw you try to negotiate 15 mazes with your two characters working in unison to complete each section. *Xor* had large, crisp graphics but lacked excitement and variety.



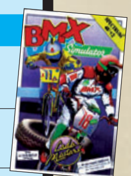
NOVEMBER 1987

AMSTRAD



1 Grand Prix Simulator (Codemasters)
2 Cricket International (Alternative)
3 Paperboy (Elite)
4 BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
5 Milk Race (Mastertronic)

SPECTRUM



1 BMX Simulator (Codemasters)
2 Run For Gold (Alternative)
3 Exolon (Hewson)
4 Road Runner (US Gold)
5 Shadows Of Mordor (Melbourne House)

COMMODORE 64



1 Arcade Classics (Firebird)
2 Kickstart 2 (Mastertronic)
3 Renegade (Imagine)
4 World Class Leaderboard (US Gold)
5 Bubble Bobble (Firebird)

MUSIC

1 China In Your Hand (T'Pau)
2 Got My Mind Set On You (George Harrison)
3 Whenever You Need Somebody (Rick Astley)
4 You Win Again (The Bee Gees)
5 Never Can Say Goodbye (The Communards)



BACK TO THE NINETIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1992



JUNE 1992 – CPC back on the Attack, Super FX chip rumoured, Putty for System 3, Wizkid not that Sensible, Titus goes Crazy for a third time and Sega mashes some monsters. Richard Burton lost his hockey mask so uses a colander…



» *GamesMaster* finally had competition in the form of Violet Berlin and *Bad Influence*… and Andy Crane, we suppose…



» [Amiga] Weird, wonderful, bizarre, original, bonkers, unusual, surreal, addictive and superb. *Wizkid* was not to be missed.



» [Mega Drive] Paint the walls with monster intestines in this terrific scrolling slash-'em-up.

So *CPC Attack*, the new Amstrad magazine, hits the newsstands, leaving people scratching their heads. Was this a shrewd move or completely nonsensical? HHL Publishing, which created *CPC Attack*, thought the former and, judging by figures recently released by ELSPA, the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association, it could have a case.

ELSPA produced a breakdown of software sales by system, and the results made for interesting reading. Amstrad's antiquated CPC attained 7 per cent of all sales, the same as the Atari ST and more than Sega's Mega Drive.

To prove that the 8-bit systems were still a force in the marketplace, it was pleasing to read that C64 software sales were responsible for more than a quarter of all purchases at 26 per cent, with the Amiga pulling in just under 20 per cent. Even the old Spectrum drew in an encouraging 14 per cent.

So what was the upshot of all this? Seemingly the 8-bit games industry still had life in it yet. And had HHL Publishing made the correct decision? No. Six issues later, *CPC Attack* was gone. Lies, damned lies and statistics…



» It's new, it's for the Amstrad, and it wasn't around for long. A bold idea but seven years too late…

Television news: the popularity of the first series of *GamesMaster* prompted Channel 4 to commission a second series of 26 episodes of the videogames programme, hosted by Dominik Diamond and featuring Patrick Moore as the Games Master.

On the back of this success, Yorkshire TV announced that it was to plunge into similar waters with its new series for Children's ITV called *Bad Influence*, hosted by Andy Crane and Violet Berlin, which would feature games and technology news. Both series would begin in October.

There were rumours flying around that Nintendo was working on a new type of cartridge for the SNES, which would incorporate a co-processor chip inside it to act as a graphics accelerator for smooth polygon graphics. The rumours proved to be true, and it wouldn't be long before we were treated to the first Super FX chip game, *Star Wing*, which emerged in early 1993.

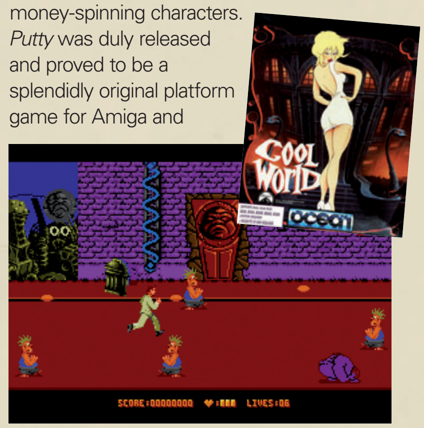
Ocean proudly unfurled its latest big game with a press release informing that it had obtained and was developing a title based on *Lethal Weapon*, the Mel Gibson cop buddy movie. Plans were afoot for a variety of versions including Amiga, SNES, C64 and Game Boy, with most resulting in a very playable platform shoot-'em-up.



» [Amiga] He rocks, he's called Chuck and he chucks rocks. Rock on.

Another well-rounded figure was Holli Would, the animated star of another of Ocean's movie-licensed games, *Cool World*. Being an animated movie, you would've thought that a videogame would be perfectly suited to the source material. Ocean thought so too and was busily working on the project for a December launch to coincide with the UK cinema release. It was available for the Amiga, ST, NES and SNES, to mention a few, and fared much like the movie: not that well.

System 3 was promising big things with the impending release of its latest game *Putty*. It was being touted as one of those games that would propel the starring character, a blob of blue goo, into the realms of Mario and Sonic as one of the Amiga's most loveable, enduring and presumably money-spinning characters. *Putty* was duly released and proved to be a splendidly original platform game for Amiga and



» [Amiga] Not a very good game, not a very good film, but a cracking bit of animated curvature thanks to Holli Would.

1992

JUNE NEWS



» You say 'potatoe', I say 'potato'. Let's call the whole thing off…

23 June saw the boss of the largest of New York's Mafia families jailed. John Gotti, the top man in the Gambino family, was sent to prison after his former right-hand man, Salvatore Gravano, was persuaded to testify against him in exchange for leniency.

Gotti had an air of being untouchable and was nicknamed the Teflon Don due to his ability to escape watertight prosecutions. He was finally prosecuted on five counts of conspiracy to commit murder and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

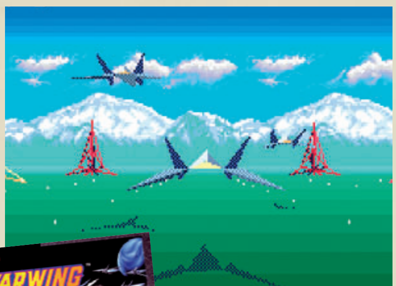


» *Batman Returns*, but all eyes were on Catwoman… or the Penguin…

15 June saw US Vice President Dan Quayle infamously misspell the word 'potato' at a spelling bee in New Jersey by incorrectly adding an 'e' to the end of the word.

26 June and a football fairytale came true when Denmark, who hadn't even qualified for the European Championships and were only included after Yugoslavia were disqualified, beat favourites Germany 2-0.

16 June brought us the worldwide premiere of *Batman Returns*, starring Michael Keaton. It featured Danny DeVito as the Penguin, and Michelle Pfeiffer donned a PVC catsuit and mask to play Catwoman. Sweet!





» [SNES] Travel through the Lylat System with the first fantastic offering using the Super FX chip.



» [Atari ST] It proved to be third time lucky for Titus after two really quite awful *Crazy Cars* offerings.

CD32 owners, although superstardom never materialised.

Sensible Software was a busy bunny. Not only was it about to release its *Sensible Soccer* game and win over an army of footy fans, but it also announced the release of *Wizkid*, to be published by Ocean Software.

Wizkid was the follow-up to the magnificent *Wizball*. Quite what the Sensible guys were thinking when they knocked up this beauty is beyond anyone's comprehension. As bizarre and weird games go, *Wizkid* was close to the top of the pile. It was surreal with an extra large helping of humour and a side order of bonkersness.

The game itself was a mishmash of genres including arcade adventure, platform and *Arkanoid*-style games. It deservedly received glowing reviews but sold rather disappointingly on the Amiga and Atari ST.

Titus Software, the developer behind *Crazy Cars*, proudly announced that work had commenced on the third instalment of the series, which was surprising in itself as the previous two efforts had been catastrophically awful across most systems. Still, a third was promised and would be available in three months' time. Thankfully *Crazy Cars III* managed to earn some semblance of respectability for the franchise with an ultra-fast trans-American race fest.

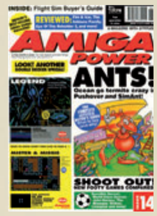
There was good news for fans of hockey masks and baseball bats splashed with crimson as Namco and Sega revealed that they were bringing the second instalment of the scrolling beat-'em-up *Splatterhouse* exclusively to the Mega Drive. It was expected to commence around September.

Mean Machines' reviews section was lacking in top games this month. Among the dross, fluff and general malaise there were only a handful of titles that received favourable comments: *Ayrton Senna's Super Monaco GP II* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Taz Mania* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Lemmings* (Sunsoft, SNES), *The Addams Family* (Ocean, SNES), *Chuck Rock* (Virgin, Mega Drive), *Super Off Road* (Ballistick, Mega Drive) and *Supreme Court Basketball* (Sega, Mega Drive).

Amiga Power had an impressive selection of games getting a once-over, with the top bananas being *The Addams Family* (Ocean), *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* (Codemasters), *Eye Of The Beholder 2* (SSI/US Gold), *Fire & Ice* (Renegade), *Midnight Resistance* (Hit Squad), *Legend* (Mindscape) and *World Class Rugby: Five Nations Edition* (Audiogenic).

THIS MONTH IN… CHARTS

AMIGA POWER



The Diary of a Game feature continued with programmer David Korn getting stuck in to some actual programming for *Mega-Lo-Mania II* from Sensible Software. The graphics were already complete; it was everything else that needed doing. The diary started with the programmer suffering a cracking hangover…



THE ONE



The One reviewed the latest Amiga, the 600, and decided it was a good little machine. Everyone else thought it was a lame duck. It was meant to be an entry-level replacement for the 500 but ended up costing more and didn't sell well, not helped by having no numeric keypad.



ZZAP!64



With a major football tournament under way it came as no surprise to see football features swamping the gaming magazines. *Zzap!* summarised the best and worst offerings for the C64, covering no less than 26 different titles, with *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* reigning supreme.



JUNE 1992

PC



1. Falcon 3 (Spectrum Holobyte/MicroProse)
2. Ultima Underworld (Mindscape/Origin)
3. Civilization (MicroProse)
4. Lemmings (Psygnosis)
5. Oh No! More Lemmings (Psygnosis)

ATARI ST



1. F1 Grand Prix (MicroProse)
2. Shadowlands (Domark)
3. RoboCop 3 (Ocean)
4. A320 Airbus (Thalion)
5. Special Forces (MicroProse)

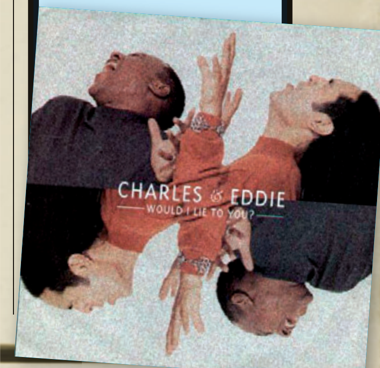
AMIGA



1. Project X (Team17)
2. Space Crusade (Gremlin)
3. F1 Grand Prix (MicroProse)
4. Black Crypt (Electronic Arts)
5. Giants Of Europe (Anco)

MUSIC

1. Would I Lie To You? (Charles & Eddie)
2. End Of The Road (Boyz II Men)
3. I Will Always Love You (Whitney Houston)
4. People Everyday (Arrested Development)
5. Boss Drum (Shamen)

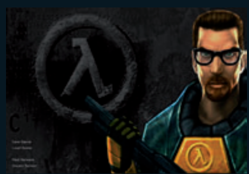


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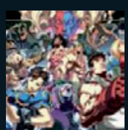
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

HALF-LIFE

THE ULTIMATE BAD DAY AT WORK



» **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA GAMES
» **RELEASED:** NA
» **GENRE:** FPS
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** DREAMCAST
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** NA



HISTORY

Black Mesa Research Facility, an ultra-secret laboratory under government contract, conducting top-secret experiments with stuff we're not supposed to know about. You play as Gordon Freeman, a Black Mesa employee. And this morning, as usual, you make your way to the research facility for an experiment. But this morning's experiment is not quite as ordinary as you thought. Odd things happen as you make your way to one of the test chambers. Even weirder things happen when you move the sample towards the anti-mass spectrometer. The experiment went wrong. Aliens have invaded the facility, injuring or killing many employees. The marines have come to kill off the aliens… and any witnesses. You'll have to fight your way to the top of the complex, and when you face your ultimate challenge, you'll see why being a government employee really does suck.

Half-Life's story is told entirely in-game: everything is seen through the eyes of the protagonist. Most story elements unfold via scripted sequences, triggered by the player reaching a certain area. If other characters have information, they address the player directly. The complex is not made up of distinct levels but is a continuous world, where it is possible to backtrack through large parts. And *Half-Life*'s arsenal is made up of realistic weapons, but there are also futuristic energy weapons developed at Black Mesa as well as organic weapons from the invading aliens, and most feature an alternate firing mode. The enemies in the game fall into two categories: aliens and human soldiers. While most aliens are not very bright, the humans will seek cover, retreat and try to drive the player from cover. The environment must be used against them, going with a general tendency of the game to alternate the combat with environmental puzzles.

It's just a shame that the solid Dreamcast port never received an official release.

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net





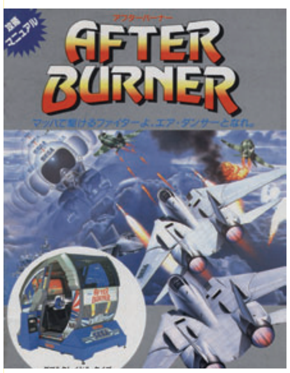
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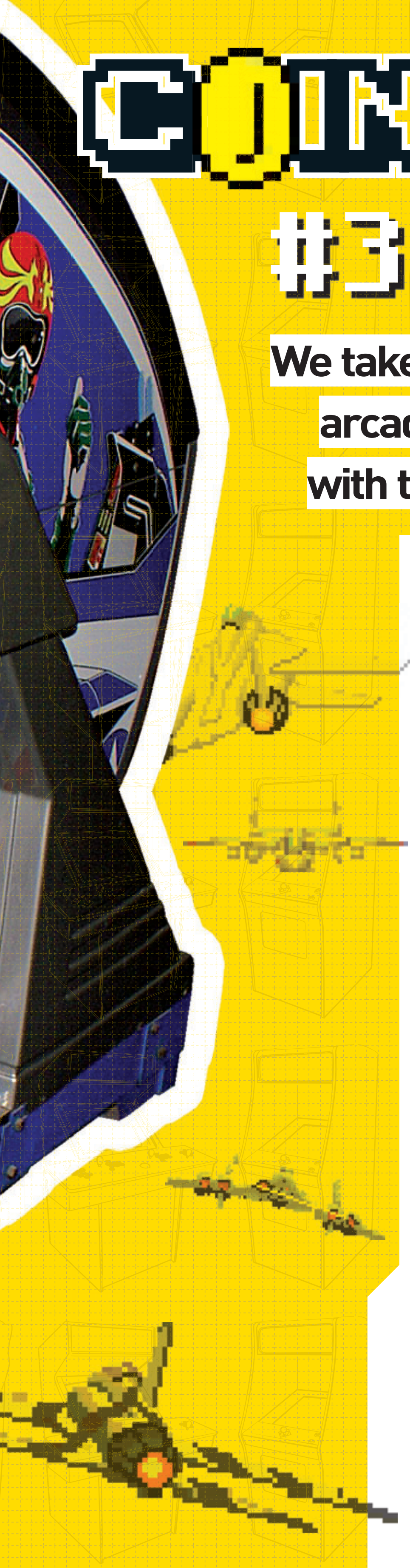
» **NAME:** BRANDY BANTZ
» **JOINED:** 11 AUGUST 2009
» **LOCATION:** SOUTH WEST
» **OCCUPATION:** BUTTON MASHER
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** AMIGA 500



IN THE KNOW

- **» Name:** After Burner
- **» Released:** 1987
- **» Publisher:** Sega
- **» Developer:** Sega-AM2
- **» Price:** £250-£500
- **» By The Same Developer:** Sega Rally





COIN-OP CAPERS

#3 After Burner

We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance with the help of those who know it best

For the benefit of those who've never piloted a supersonic plane, the afterburner is the bit found at the back that resembles the glowing eye of Sauron. It provides a temporary influx of thrust to the pilot, and enables them to take off and evade nasty enemy pilots who are out to kill them. Basically, it helps fast things go even faster, and thus serves as the perfect title for one of the most exhilarating arcade experiences ever conjured up by those crazy bods at Sega.

After Burner was one of the earliest games to come from Sega gaming maestro Yu Suzuki and his AM2 R&D team. Throughout his career, Suzuki has always shown a passion for looking to Western cultures and influences for inspiration in the premise, themes and characters in his games. This was evident in *OutRun* and *Hang-On*, which were both released two years earlier than *After Burner*. But it was *After Burner* that really showcased his motif so concisely.

It takes all of two nanoseconds to make the connection that *After Burner* was inspired by the 1986 action classic from Tony Scott, *Top Gun*. The plane you piloted was an F-14 Tomcat, the soundtrack was similarly rock-based, and the game's setting and colours – the crisp blue sea and glorious-looking visuals – had a perfect Hollywood veneer to them. But what it was that made *After Burner* truly great was that it was a flight simulator in the very loosest sense of the term. The controls were easy to pick up, the combat was uncomplicated, and the gameplay was exhilarating. The polar opposite of *After Burner* is a befuddling flight simulator, packed with a weighty instruction manual forcing you to wade through 300 paragraphs of nonsensical flight jargon just to learn how to get out of the game's start menu.

But then *After Burner* was also a bit of an oddity, in that it saw a sequel that basically rendered the original game redundant. Released a few months after the original game, *After Burner II* was more a refinement of the original game and boasted nominal differences. It ramped up the level count from 18 to 22 – there are actually 23 stages but the final stage is a weird automated landing animation – and added more enemies and gave them the ability to chase your plane's tail. The game also gave players throttle control, enabled them to speed up and slow down and force those pesky enemy planes to whizz past and be wide open for a kill. Other differences in the sequel included the inclusion of air and on-ground refuelling and rearming points, odd vehicular cameos from the Ferrari from *OutRun* and the motorbike from *Hang-On*, slightly different music, and the ability to fire the plane's missiles more frequently, all working to make the game a bit easier.



When *After Burner II* had finished confusing its fans in arcades it went on to spawn a series of spiritual sequels. Ask us and we'll tell you that the Sega arcade games *G-LOC* and *Strike Fighter* are all essentially in-cockpit spins on *After Burner*, and *Sky Fighter* a polygon re-imagining. And enforcing this belief, Sega actually used the *After Burner* moniker for the title of a game that was essentially just a Mega-CD port of *Strike Fighter*: *After Burner III*.

It becomes apparent that over the years Sega was unnecessarily trying to bridge that gap between arcade and simulator with its air combat series while nervously trialling each formula without the *After Burner* name. Sega would eventually come to its senses, though. The last two games in the series not only have the *After Burner* name – *After Burner Climax* and the PSP's *After Burner: Black Falcon* – but also have gameplay that is far more reminiscent of the first two classic arcade games. *



COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



David Hernly, a longtime *After Burner* fan, was recognised by Twin Galaxies as the record holder on *After Burner II* earlier this year. What is it about this series that keeps him hooked?

PROFILE

- » **Name:** David Hernly
- » **Age:** 38
- » **Date of birth:** 20 July 1971
- » **Top five games:**
  Virtua Racing
  Krull
  Bionic Commando
  OutRun
  Thunder Blade
  (Yes, there is a Sega theme here)

■ Do you remember the first time you saw *After Burner* in an arcade and what impressed you about the machine at the time?
I first played *After Burner* at Putt-Putt Golf & Games in Richmond, Virginia. They had the deluxe sit-down version right inside the front door. I spent a lot of time playing it during Super Saturdays, at which they would put a lot of credits on all the machines so it was practically free-play. The motion of the deluxe cabinet was an obvious wow factor, but the speed of the game was so cool for back then. Throw in the rocking soundtrack and it was a tour de force in its day. When I came upon an *After Burner II* upright 20 years later I snapped it right up. I'd love to have a deluxe cabinet but it's so large that it's not practical for a home.

■ What's your favourite stage in the game, and which is the trickiest to complete?
My favourite has always been Stage 6. It's when the game really starts to get harder, and it's also my favourite music track from the game. If you watch me play you'll usually catch me tapping my foot to the beat. As for the trickiest, I always get tripped up by Stage 10. It always seems to give me fits as the game starts throwing things at you from all directions, so you have to really be on your toes.



■ Do you remember the first time you completed *After Burner II*?
It was during a Super Saturday within the first month Putt-Putt got the game in. Let's just say I used a lot of continues back then. When I landed back on the carrier I thought it was the coolest thing. Aside from *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* it was the only game I have ever 'finished' at the arcade so I was very pleased.

■ Which home conversion of *After Burner* is your favourite and why?
My favourite is the *Sega Ages* version for the PlayStation. It was a nice 3D upgrade to the original and was a great precursor to *After Burner Climax*.

■ How good are you at similar Sega arcade games such as *Space Harrier* and *Thunder Blade*?
I'm pretty good at all of the Sega games of that era, and I would include *OutRun* with those two as well. I played a lot of other Sega titles back then but was always drawn to these because of their combination of speed, visuals and sound. It was a mixture you just didn't see in other titles of the time.

■ Which version of the cabinet do you prefer playing and why?
I like both but for different reasons. If I'm playing for fun I prefer the deluxe sit-down for the movement and engulfing sound. If I'm playing for score

» The upright might not be as impressive as the sit-down, but it's better for high scores.



Magic Moments

We duck and roll through some of the best bits from Sega's airborne classic

Take Off
The iconic opening of *After Burner* begins with the player's F-14 fighter being launched from an aircraft carrier.





Fireball
The death sequence in *After Burner* is particularly gratuitous and sees your plane transform into a ball of flames.

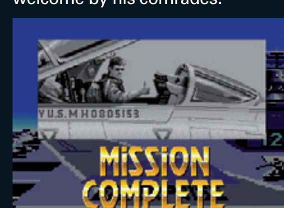
Cameos
After Burner II features two cameos. One is the *Hang-On* motorcycle, and the other is by the *OutRun* Ferrari.





Chasin' Tail
In *After Burner II*, enemy planes can chase you. Slam on the air brakes to force them into your crosshair, then boom!

Fin
The finale to *After Burner* serves up yet another *Top Gun*-ism as our gallant pilot is given a hero's welcome by his comrades.





I always prefer the upright so I can focus on the game.

■ Have you played any of *After Burner II*'s formal sequels like *After Burner Climax*, or its informal sequels like *G-LOC*, *Strike Fighter* or *Sky Target*? If so, what's your impression of them?
I've played them all. Here are my thoughts on each…

G-LOC: A fun shooter, but since it didn't feature that sense of sheer speed that *After Burner* had I always thought the gameplay felt slow.

Strike Fighter: Always reminded me of a Sega version of Namco's *Ace Combat*. Gameplay was short and the pace was slow. It never held my attention.

Sky Target: While it was clearly an attempt to remake *After Burner*, it just didn't capture the same magic of the original. The design of the game had some clear flaws and I think it's the least fun of this list.

After Burner Climax: Without a doubt this is by far the best of the 'sequels'. It's the original gameplay with a few slight updates and it works. It's a wonderful update to the original that even includes a modern version of the original soundtrack.

■ Can you tell us a little more about your impressive *After Burner II* record? How did you manage to reach such a remarkable score?
I own an upright *After Burner II* cabinet and practise on it at home. I have always played for the record at Funspot in New Hampshire, because they have both the upright and the deluxe sit-down. I achieved my current score in April of this year while attending the Funspot XI tournament. I also have no plans to rest on my current score, so look for more news at Funspot XII.

■ Why do you think *After Burner* has remained such a popular game among retro gamers?
The deluxe sit-down version has always remained beloved because it was the first of its kind. The cockpit-style sit-down cabinet had been around for years, but never with the range of movement that *After Burner* had. Sega, of course, later went on to create the R360. *

DAVID'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

The expert *After Burner* player reveals his personal tips and strategy to mastering the game and racking up those high scores

1 ■ DON'T GET GREEDY!
Focus more on what enemies are coming at you and you'll last longer.

2 ■ LET 'EM FLY!
You have unlimited bullets for your Vulcan cannon, so hold that trigger down the whole time. You can catch ships coming and going easier if you do.

3 ■ LEARN THE FORMATIONS
Each wave of enemies has specific formations you can pattern. If you learn them it will help you rack up the points.

4 ■ TEACH YOURSELF
Teach yourself to listen for the 'Fire!' sound cue, or when you see the 'Lock On' light below the screen. Fire a missile every time you do and you'll always score a hit.

5 ■ USE THE WHOLE SCREEN
To avoid the missile attacks, learn to fly around the entire screen and don't stay still. If you stay in one spot, they'll get you!

6 ■ THROTTLE WITH CARE
Speeding up is necessary in later levels, but the faster you go, the faster the enemy missiles come at you.

7 ■ BEWARE THE SMOKE
Take care to not flood the screen with too many missiles. The smoke trails can quickly fill the whole screen, preventing you from seeing missiles, enemies, obstacles and other things coming at you. You can't avoid what you can't see, after all.

the sequels

We look at the debatable *After Burner* sequels that Sega spawned



G-LOC: Air Battle
Released: 1990
G-LOC – which, according to the game's marquee, stood for Loss Of Consciousness by G-force – was essentially a sequel to *After Burner* but with the action viewed from inside the cockpit, unless you're forced into evasive action, in which case the perspective switches to third-person. Flying an experimental aircraft, you embarked on various missions, and your plane also had a damage bar.



Strike Fighter
Released: 1992
Released in Japan, *Strike Fighter* was essentially a sequel to *G-LOC*. It ran from the same Sega Galaxy Force engine, so shared similar graphics and also kept the same perspective, but ditched the objective-based missions in favour of more *After Burner*-style affairs. The game was ported to the Mega-CD as *After Burner III*. *Strike Fighter* also saw a sequel in 2000 on Naomi hardware.



Sky Target
Released: 1995
Running on Sega's Model 2 hardware, *Sky Target* marks the first polygonal entry in the series. It's also the first to offer branching stages and, other than the SMS port of *After Burner*, boss fights. While *G-LOC* and *Strike Fighter* don't hold a candle to *After Burner*, *Sky Target* gives a far worse performance. Its lethargic gameplay didn't stop it from later seeing a release on the Sega Saturn and PC, though.



After Burner Climax
Released: 2006
Running on Lindbergh hardware, this polished arcade update is one of the best in the series. Beautiful, crisp graphics and vistas, insane combat and, more essentially, a sense of speed meant that *Climax* ticked all the boxes. Add to the mix a new slow-mo 'climax' mode, and you basically have the *After Burner* equivalent of *OutRun 2*. Shame it never found a home port.



After Burner: Black Falcon
Released: 2007
An okay stab at a less arcadey version of *After Burner*, hence the story and allowing you to pick the mission order and unlock more as you go. It offers a new air-to-ground weapon and licensed planes, plus it retains the handy barrel roll manoeuvre to evade incoming fire. *Black Falcon* holds quite a bit of variety but doesn't quite live up to the heritage of the first two games.

COIN-OP CAPERS

the machine

We speak with IT consultant and arcade owner Shaun Meldon to ask him about how he's getting on with his rolling restoration of a deluxe *After Burner* cabinet



My name is Shaun Meldon. I'm an IT consultant who loves retro arcade games and I also co-run Arcade Barn (**www.arcadebarn.co.uk**). *After Burner* is one of my favourite games for its mix of fast, detailed graphics, pumping soundtrack and the ability to make your plane spin and loop. I bought the game from a local operator. It was still working in a holiday park, but it needed repairing, so a friend Aran and I badgered the owner into selling it to us. It got loaded into a trailer by a forklift and, when we unloaded it, it broke its wheels just getting it into the barn! The game was still running when we got it and it's become a rolling restoration now.

HYDRAULICS

The main up and down movement is created by a simple motor with a large wheel with a rubber tyre. The cab rests on this and the wheel moves the cab up and down by turning. There are auxiliary wheels that also help this movement, and we need to get some more tyres as ours are nearly worn out. The sideways movement is another motor that creates the movements and shaking when you crash. We had to spend a huge amount of time trying to clean off the grime just so we could see the motors.



THE SEAT

The seat you climb into is covered with a lovely blue textured carpet – well that's what it feels like – trimmed with nice chrome edging. It has nice side art but is fairly plain but good at its job of keeping you in as your hit plane crashes into the sea and you're shaken around to simulate a crash.

MONITOR

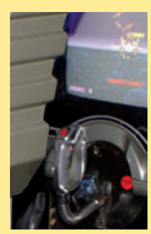


This one still has its original monitor and it's still really sharp. It did need a clean, though, as it was caked in a massive layer of grime. Trying to get at it is not easy, as you have to take all the bezel off and remove the glass covering the monitor. The glass had a large crack in it so we had a special piece cut just for us.

PCB

To our amazement this was still going strong with no issues under a pile of dust about 2cm thick. It's a big board with even more wires and auxiliary boards. Frankly we are too scared to touch it just in case it went wrong, but we air dusted it and cleaned all the cables so it looks much nicer now. On the whole I find these types of boards are best left alone if they are working. The main board all tucks under the main body of the cab, snug in its own compartment.

HANDLE



The flight handle has taken some stick but is still hanging in there. Someone in the past had obviously done a little repair work on it as the missile and machine gun buttons were wired back to front, so we rewired it back to what it should have been. Getting the screws out of the handle is not easy after they had been stuck with sweat and other questionable substances. The start button was replaced too as it had been broken over the years.



ARTWORK

Considering that it's 22 years old, the artwork was in very good condition. The logo on the front is nice and fresh looking and screams, 'This is a big cab'. The sides still have the pilot graphics and have stood the test of time. The back plastic is all in one piece and looks very nice. And there is very little that is worn apart from where the plastic skirts have brushed against the cab as it moved up and down.

COIN MECH



Not a big fan of coin mechs as when you're running it for fun they have a tendency to stick, clog up or just stop working. We fitted a credit button to the coin tower so that when people come to play it at our open days they can just press it to get a credit.

MARQUEE



The marquee on an *After Burner* deluxe is huge. We had to rewire ours with a new kit as it had burnt out, but this allowed us to use UK 240v parts and do a little rewiring rather than use US/Jap 100/120v equipment, which is harder to get and more awkward. Sadly ours has been painted a little at some point in the past to stop the marquee artwork slowly breaking up due to heat. We are on the lookout for another, so if any readers out there know where we can get one please let us know.

developer Q&A

We chat to Darrin Stubbington, creator of the US C64 version of *After Burner*

■ How did you land the job of converting *After Burner*?
I was working in Silicon Valley for a company called IDG-SEGA. My job was to convert PAL to NTSC on Commodore 64 games. This job involved not only making all the timing adjustments, but speeding up parts of the game and improving portions as needed. I also then created a disk version, as the US C64 did not use tape drives. When we received the PAL version of *After Burner*, there was not much that could be done to improve it without a complete rewrite. IDG decided that we should create a new version.

■ There were two distinct versions of *After Burner* on the C64: yours and the UK port. Why was that?
The PAL version was awful, and not representative of the coin-op in very many ways. The sound was terrible, and everything about it was horrid.

■ Had you played the game before, and were you a fan of the arcade game?
Yes, I spent a lot of time in arcades and was a big fan. *After Burner* was always a thrill to play. The sense of speed was great, and it was very cool to blow stuff up!

■ Did you receive support from the original developers?
No, we did it from scratch.

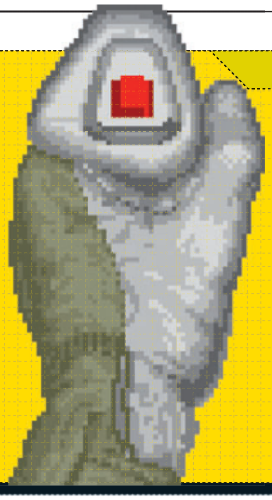
■ Have you played the other 8-bit conversions and, if so, which do you feel was the best?
The best other version was probably on the Sega Master System because of the nice frame rate. However, that version is even less like the original than the PAL C64 version. Obviously I'd like to think my version best represented the original!

■ How long did the conversion take you and how many people worked on it?
It took about six months, and was worked on by my room-mate at the time, Scott Blum, and myself. I did graphics and some layout but was actually working on PAL to NTSC conversions of many other Sega arcade games at the time in addition to this one.

■ What do you think is the most difficult aspect about converting a game?
Frame rate and sprite multiplexing and faking things with shifting characters. The coin-op at that time was about equal to an Amiga or Atari ST, so shoe-horning that into the poor old C64 was quite a challenge. In the end we did the best we could to just recreate the mood of each level, hoping that arcade fans would forgive us for any missing items – there's a lot.

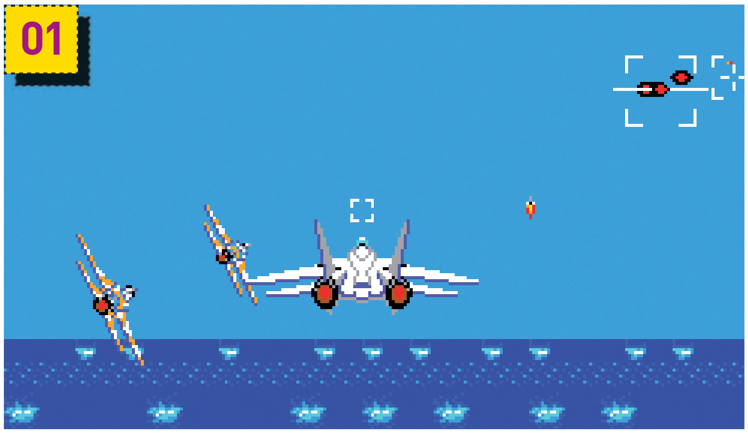


COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions



Which conversion of *After Burner* took our breath away, and which landed in the danger zone?

01



02



03



01. Master System
This is the first home port of *After Burner*, and it's also probably the best-looking 8-bit port. But it's not without issues. The looping music has the power to fry brain cells, and there's a rather large gameplay flaw too: stick your plane to either corner of the screen and the enemy bullets can't touch you. It also features an end boss that wasn't in the arcade.

02. NES
Both *After Burner* and its sequel were released on the NES. The first was developed by Tengen for the US, while the sequel, which is the better version, was handled by Sunsoft and released for the Famicom in Japan. Both are acceptable ports but are prone to heinous bouts of flickering. The F-14 also seems to roll sporadically, thus locking its movement and leaving it open for attack, making the gameplay very frustrating.

03. Mega Drive
Developed by third-party studio Dempa, this is one of the best Sega arcade conversions to grace the Mega Drive. It looks great, scrolls quickly and feels faithful to the arcade game. You also have the added bonus of throttle controls, being able to tweak difficulty, configure the controls and listen to the soundtrack in the options menu. This is a sterling effort and one of the best versions out there.

04. ZX Spectrum
What this port, written by Keith Burkhill, lacks in colour it more than makes up for in speed. Overall it feels incredibly quick, and the music is pretty good too. This version includes the refuelling points and the chasing enemy bogeys too. It's also one of those versions where the F-14 fires automatically, which can render the experience less exciting.

05. C64
Two versions of *After Burner* were released for the C64: a European version and a US version written by Darrin Stubbington and pal Scott Blum. Our version is the worst there is, with messy graphics and gameplay to boot, but the US version is superb. Hampered only by sparse scenery and more sedate gameplay, the US one really excels in the visuals and gameplay stakes.

06. CPC
The CPC version is pretty much identical to the Speccy conversion, albeit more colourful. Annoyingly, in this port you can only seem to hit enemy planes when they're within heavy petting distance. This, plus the fact that your plane is given a ridiculously small area to manoeuvre in, makes dodging missiles a real misery.

07. PC-Engine
Reprogrammed by NEC, this is a superb version that does a fantastic job of recreating the arcade game. It boasts gorgeous graphics, excellent sound and quick gameplay. It also lets you tweak the difficulty, invert the controls and – rather oddly – tweak the colours too.

08. 32X (Best Version)
Going by the somewhat showy title of *After Burner Complete*, this 32X port is widely cited as the definitive home version of *After Burner* – obviously ignoring the *Sega Ages* version on the Saturn and the freebie in *Shenmue II*, which are nigh-on arcade perfect and boast analogue controls. Developed by Rutubo Games, this is a faithful port that boasts great sound and visuals.

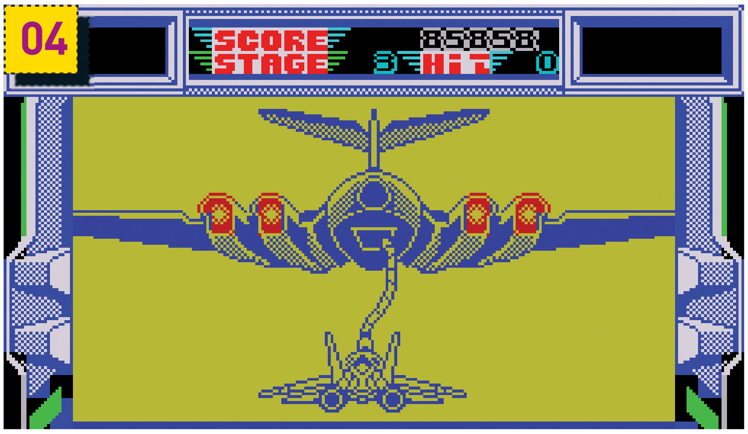
09. Amiga
Like the C64, the Amiga received two ports: a European one ripped from the Atari ST version with minimal differences, and a superior US port that trounces them both. Heed our advice and ignore the Activision ports at all costs.

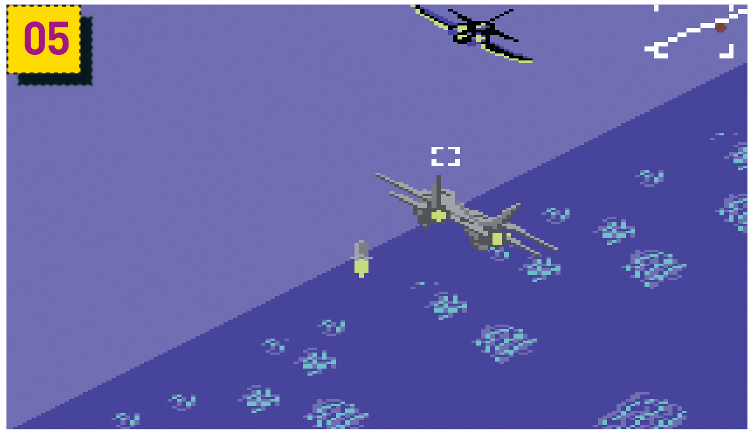
10. MSX (Worst Version)
This is another Activision/Speccy conversion. It has all the levels, including refuelling sections, and there is missile lock too. The monochrome graphics look far messier than the Spectrum port, but when the game is finished, you do get a decent reproduction of the arcade ending.

11. GBA
Forming part of the *Sega Arcade Pack*, this ambitious portable version, which was based on the original version of the game, rather than the sequel, is sadly a poor effort. While it certainly looks impressive and the action feels nippy, like the *Space Harrier* conversion we reviewed a few issues back, the arcade's twitchy gameplay doesn't really respond well to the GBA's tiny buttons.

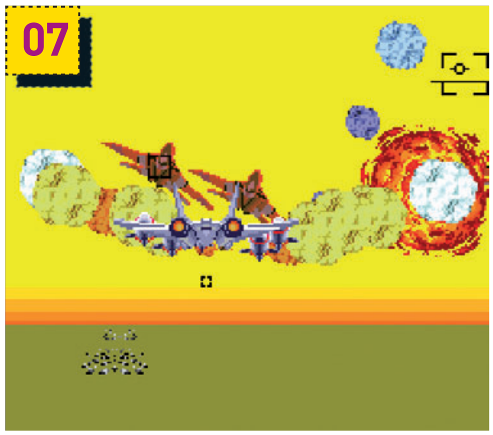
12. PlayStation 2
Forming part of Sega's *Sega Ages 2500* volume, which updated many classic arcade games, *After Burner* was one of the better games to make the transition. It's a pretty faithful re-imagining and gives the player a choice between three aircraft.

13. Atari ST
There's not much in it, but we reckon the ST version is better than the Amiga, and it's believed that the Amiga version was simply a port anyway. Like all the lacklustre Activision ports, it doesn't do the arcade game justice, but it remains one of the company's better efforts.


04
SCORE
STAGE
85858
3
HIT
0


05


06


07


08
33170
HIT
1
Best Version
STAGE


09
SPEED
STAGE
1


10
SCORE
STAGE
1
HIT
Worst Version
SPEED


11
208000
STAGE


12
1391290
HIT
0
STAGE
4


13
STAGE
1

BOSS/RUSH

WHERE WE SQUARE OFF AGAINST THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

DRAGON BREED



GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHER:** IREM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



» [Arcade] The magnificently ugly second level boss is about two screens high and has vicious dragon-busting tentacles and a very foul temper.



» [Arcade] The impressive Cyberdragon guardian sports a nifty gun-metal paint job and adamantium dentures.

Irem has always had a penchant for clever and original control mechanics in its shoot-'em-up games – witness *R-Type*'s detachable 'Force' unit or the free-floating 'arms' of *X-Multiply*'s peculiar spacecraft. *Dragon Breed* continues this tradition, casting players as a young warrior-king atop a looping oriental-looking dragon, its head and body a handy shield against incoming projectiles and its whip-like tail a wonderfully effective tool for dispatching the bad guys.

With a visual style more reminiscent of Psygnosis's *Shadow Of The Beast* than the *R-Type* series, *Dragon Breed* even makes concessions to traditional platform titles, with its unique feature of allowing your character to disembark from his scaly steed and scout ledges for power-ups on foot, while your dragon guardian floats above, automatically dispatching incoming enemies for you. It's an oddly diverting experience as shooters go, made even more memorable by its varied bestiary of nightmarish and surreal end-of-level bosses.

From bizarre bio-mechanical crustacea to winged, tentacled monstrosities and disembodied laser-spitting skulls, Irem's artists have a grand old time trying to come up with suitably outlandish creations to impress and subtly disturb the player. And it would seem that they aren't afraid to take inspiration from their own past titles – the memorable third level of the game apes *R-Type*'s famous 'Mothership' stage, interspersing floating platforms with huge, turret-encrusted battleships, and featuring a fireball-spewing Cyberdragon boss packing a set of Giger-esque fangs.

It's probably just as well that for the majority of *Dragon Breed*'s six levels, the game's difficulty doesn't really come close to that of the *R-Type* games, seeing as your ability to mop up enemies and bullets with your dragon's hindquarters renders you relatively immune to most enemy attacks given a modicum of shmup ability. It also helps that most of the in-game weapons, particularly the eight-way crescent-shaped projectiles and the homing 'dragon missiles' are probably a little overpowered. Especially when you wrap your dragon's extremities into a compact ball for a super attack blast of the crescent weapon.

For the game's final guardian, however, Irem's fiendish designers throw a curve ball. Your target, an enormous humanoid torso sporting what appears to be Darth Vader's fantasy headgear, sits behind some kind of purple force field. You blast away at it, only to immediately perish in a hail of bullets in response. Only after numerous retries and premature deaths do you realise exactly what's going on here: those lethal bullets are your own munitions reflected back at you by the impenetrable shield. Its weak point? A floating orb that must have its energy whittled down by taking tentative pot shots while avoiding its attacks and your own reflected barrage. Succeed and you'll free your kingdom and discover that your dragon pal is the last of his kind, which will probably make you feel a tad guilty about all the bullet holes you've seemingly put in him along the way…

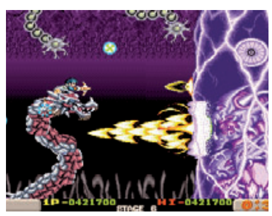
"SUCCEED AND YOU'LL FREE YOUR KINGDOM AND DISCOVER THAT YOUR DRAGON PAL IS THE LAST OF HIS KIND, WHICH WILL PROBABLY MAKE YOU FEEL A TAD GUILTY…"



» [Arcade] Things start to get a bit tricky here with level four's mechanical spiders, which pelt you with bullet swarms.



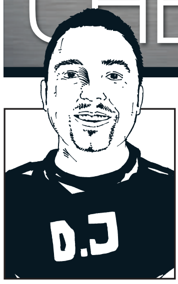
» [Arcade] This skull boss is rather anatomically bizarre but not so hard to defeat if you just circle him.



» [Arcade] *Dragon Breed*'s final boss is by far the game's toughest challenge. Even your own bullets will kill you here…

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



If there's one thing we've learned about retro gaming it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…

WINTER GAMES

- » **SYSTEM:** C64
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- » **DEVELOPER:** EPYX



Once upon a time, sports-based joystick wagglers and button bashers used to be all the rage. *Daley Thompson's Decathlon, Hyper Sports, Combat School* – the list was seemingly endless. One of our favourite developers of this particular genre was Epyx, and as the cold December nights are now upon us it made perfect sense to look at one of its greatest sports games.

Our first encounter with *Winter Games* was when our mate handed his joystick to us and said: "Here, do this for me. I'm bloody knackered." The event in question was the stamina-destroying biathlon that saw you trekking over what felt like miles of snowy hills, only to have to then pull off five accurate shots with a rifle and then repeat the whole process.

Despite this trial by fire, we absolutely adored *Winter Games*, and while it's now showing its age and doesn't appear to have as many events as we remembered, it nevertheless remains a solid effort by Epyx.

Of course, this will come as no surprise to many, as Epyx certainly knew its stuff when it came to making sports games. This wintry follow-up to Epyx's successful *Summer Games* boasted slick, surprisingly detailed visuals, seven events to compete in, and the ability to play against seven other players by taking turns.

The seven available events were surprisingly varied, and while it had a few duffers – we were never big fans of the figure-skating offerings – the other five events provided hours of fun. While speed skating was fairly simplistic, it worked because winning came down to masterful timing and not how quickly you could mash your keyboard. Biathlon took a similar route but was made all the more difficult due to its varied terrain and the aforementioned target shooting that would affect your score.

Bobsled was arguably the trickiest event to get to grips with – we've lost count of the number of times we've messed up that first turn over the years – but also proved to be one of the most rewarding once you'd sussed out what you were meant to be doing. The two final events on offer were hot dog and ski jump. Hot dog had you pulling off elaborate freestyle jumps on a pair of skis, while ski jump had you sailing gracefully into the ether and trying to clear as much ground as possible before you landed.

Every game – yup, even the dull figure-skating events – worked well, largely because Epyx kept the controls nice and simple, effectively allowing anyone to pick up and master the basics in just a few turns. Longevity was also assured thanks to *Winter Games* adopting a similar setup to its predecessor that allowed up to eight players to compete over any number of events. Indeed, competition was key in *Winter Games*, and there was nothing more satisfying than nicking a gold medal from a mate at the very last possible moment. Eventually ported to all manner of 8- and 16-bit systems, *Winter Games* remains a brilliant party game that can be played regardless of the weather outside.



» [Spectrum] Master the ski jump and you can rack up some gigantic distances.



» [Amstrad] Hot dog is great fun thanks to its slick animation and varied tricks.

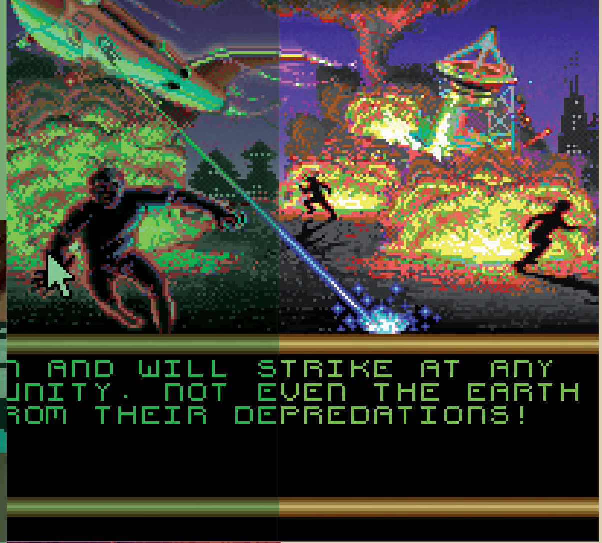


» [C64] The Biathlon is a real endurance test.



» [C64] Darran's rubbish at this. He couldn't get past this corner.

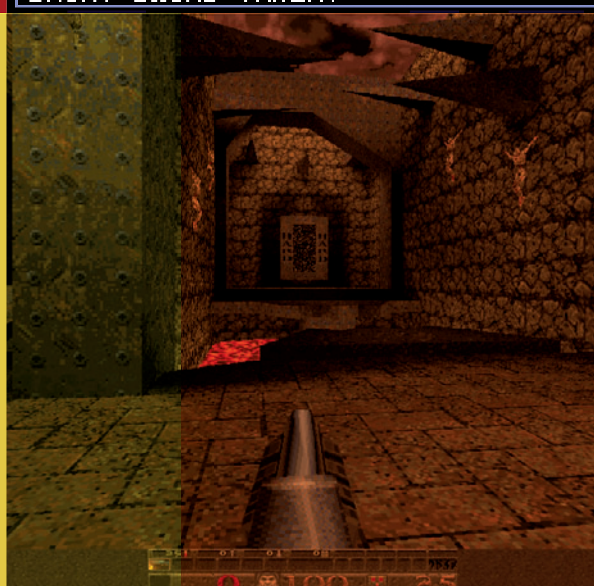



AND WILL STRIKE AT ANY
NOT EVEN THE EARTH
THEIR DEPREDATIONS!

DOS




YOU CAN'T GO THAT WAY.
YOU CAN'T GO THAT WAY.
SHORT SWORD TAKEN.






Disasters Windows
Jun 1982 <DEMOCITY> $966,959


IDLE



DOS Gaming: A Bluffer's Guide

MS-DOS powered most of the gaming that went on in the PC world from 1981 until it was supplanted by Microsoft's Windows 95 towards the end of the Nineties. This transition meant that rather than dying out, like so many retro platforms have, PC gaming is still with us in another form. Join Michael Reed as he tells you everything you need to become a DOS master

The MS-DOS driven PC is a platform that probably doesn't get the amount of respect that it deserves, and there are a few reasons for this. Firstly, the platform lacked the closure of a sad farewell because, towards the end of the classic DOS era, PC gamers played a combination of DOS and Windows games. This smooth transition, as opposed to a clean break, seems to have eliminated the typical feelings of nostalgia that develop for an old platform. Secondly, the success of the PC wasn't built upon emotional attachment in the first place because PCs weren't cute; they were functional, beige business tools. PCs also lacked an image for gamers to fixate upon as so many manufacturers made so many different models. Thirdly, thanks to backwards compatibility, no one bothered to keep their old PC when they upgraded to a new model. The lack of these emotional triggers has consigned the classic vintage PC to be a retro platform that people tend to forget about.

It's a shame, too, because it's one of the best formats to get interested in. The platform has a unique character all of its own, and there are thousands of great games. It was also uniquely long-lived compared to other retro platforms, the different eras combining to make it like two or three different platforms in one.

But, to fully understand PC gaming, you have to start at the beginning…

A bit of history…

Until the start of the Eighties, most personal ownership of computers extended only to games consoles, and that's hardly surprising, as the computers of that time were huge, expensive, and frankly, a bit boring. Institutions such as banks were typically the customers for computers that would live out their lives in specially built ventilated rooms. This all began to change when companies like Commodore and Apple decided that ordinary people might want to use computers in the office or home.

This new trend had not escaped the attention of the grey beards at IBM, and the decision was taken that IBM would make its own personal computer. Subsequently, the IBM PC came together in about a year; a short time by any standards, and remarkably so for a leviathan like IBM. It achieved this by eschewing the typical design procedure for a major new project, instead building the machine out of off-the-shelf components. This decision would have unexpected repercussions for IBM.

The IBM PC was released in 1981. At a couple of thousand pounds, with monitor, it was a bit more expensive than some contemporary personal computers but considerably cheaper than the mini and mainframe systems that had made up IBM's core business up until then. The basic model had 64K of RAM, a 4.77MHz CPU and a floppy disk drive. Command-driven Microsoft DOS was the operating system. This was before computers like the Commodore Amiga and Apple Macintosh made a mouse-operated graphical interface a standard feature.

No doubt, by 1982, the higher-ups in IBM were reasoning that if there was going to be a change in how people used computers, at least IBM now had a serious stake in it. Then something happened that took IBM by surprise: a company called Columbia Data Products



THE DREADED COMMAND LINE

PCs were latecomers to the world of mouse-controlled user interfaces. In the early days, games were loaded by simply placing a disk in the drive and powering up the system. As hard disk adoption became widespread, users had to get the hang of using the command line. Even now, some people are probably put off the idea of messing around with DOS games because a command-driven system can seem intimidating. In practice, there's not much to it. Typing 'dir' gives a list of all files on the disk. Type 'cd' followed by the name of a game folder to enter it. The programs that you can run are marked with .bat, .exe or .com on the end. Easy, eh?

created the first IBM PC compatible computer, the MPC 1600. This had been made possible by the fact that IBM's PC had been made from commonly available components in order to speed up the design process. Making matters worse for IBM, the MPC 1600 was also cheaper and had slightly higher specs than the original IBM PC. Later that year Compaq announced a portable IBM PC compatible. Subsequently, other manufacturers began to make their own clones and the term PC would come to refer to IBM PC compatible computers rather than its original general meaning of any personal computer.

Early PC gaming

As a games machine, the capabilities of the original IBM PC were middling, and it was more expensive than a dedicated home computer. This fact highlights a key point about the early years of PC gaming: due to its cost, it was bought for serious use and games remained something of a novelty on what was, effectively, a business computer.

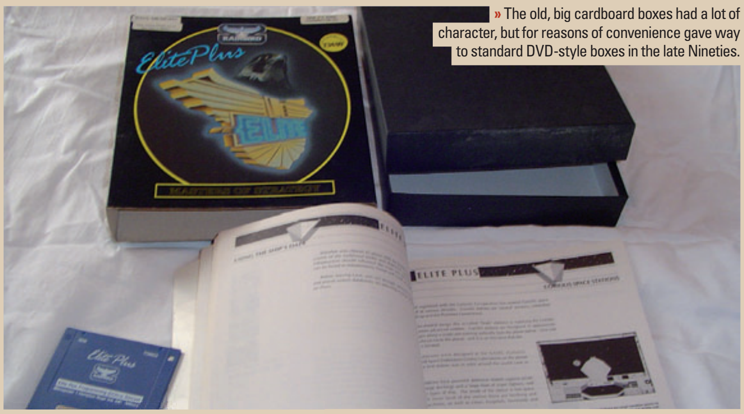
A lot of the early commercial games were ports from other systems, produced as a sideline by established publishers. The fact that the demographic that owned PCs was typically older, coupled with the limitations of the machine in the area of fast, colourful graphics, combined to attract a more serious class of games such as those in the strategy, adventure and simulation genres. Sierra Online, already a creator of highly lauded graphical adventure games, became an early supporter of the platform thanks to IBM itself. IBM commissioned the company to create a launch title for its IBM PC Jr home computer. The launch game was *King's Quest*, and although the PC Jr was not a success, *King's Quest* itself was a hit when it was made available for the standard IBM PC, among other platforms.

Strategic Simulations Inc was one of the established companies that supported the PC from the beginning, but founder Joel Billings told us that he wasn't particularly enamoured with the early PCs. "I remember that the first IBM PC was very clunky and hard for us to deal with. Knowing how big and successful IBM was, I'm sure we thought it would eventually do very well. We definitely wanted to get some games working on it. At SSI we wanted to support the PC because we wanted to support all personal computers that had any substantial installed base."

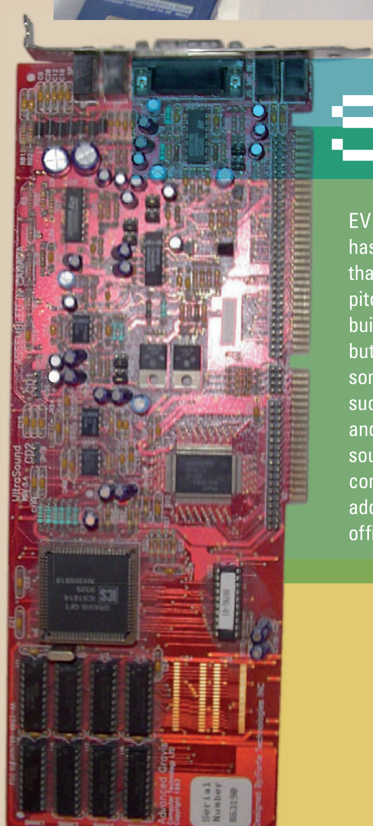
Although shoot-'em-up games were never the main thrust of the PC gaming scene, some high-quality coin-up conversions were made in the early days. In 1983, Atarisoft did conversions of some arcade classics such as *Defender*, *Battlezone* and *Dig Dug*, while Brøderbund contributed a very good conversion of *Star Wars*.

The 286 Era

By the mid-Eighties, the PC market began to take flight thanks to the cheap clones from companies such as Tandy and Compaq. Although IBM had lost its exclusive control of the platform, it continued to introduce improvements that would then become official extensions to the standard. In 1984, the company introduced two major refinements in the form of the IBM PC/AT and the EGA graphics system. The AT architecture was based around the considerably faster Intel 80286 processor. As the model numbers of Intel processors were becoming a mouthful, most of the press referred to both the CPU and the class of machine as simply the '286'. These new developments were largely software compatible with the original PC specification, and this practice



» The old, big cardboard boxes had a lot of character, but for reasons of convenience gave way to standard DVD-style boxes in the late Nineties.



SOUND CARDS

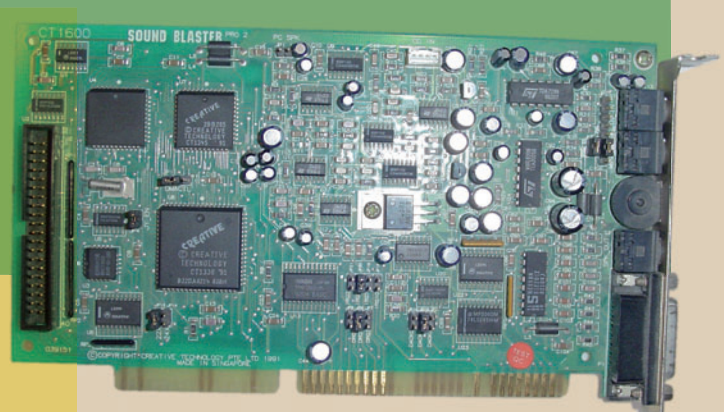
EVERY IBM PC COMPATIBLE has a basic sound generator than can play one note of varying pitch through a single speaker built into the computer case, but PC owners soon yearned for something better. Companies such as Covox, Creative Labs and Ad Lib began to offer add-on sound cards, leading to a set of competing standards. As these add-ons weren't part of the official IBM PC specification, each game had to offer support for every model. To add value and save on expansion slots, most sound cards included a standard PC game port for a joystick.

The Sound Blaster

After the first few years, the Creative Labs Sound Blaster became the most popular sound card, and most cards aimed at gamers offered compatibility with it. The first Sound Blaster offered a simple 11-voice music synthesizer in addition to digital audio playback and full Ad Lib compatibility: extremely generous facilities for the time. Subsequent models introduced 16-bit sound and better musical capabilities while maintaining full backwards compatibility with the original Sound Blaster.

The Gravis Ultrasound

Regarded by many as one of the finest DOS gaming sound cards, the Gravis Ultrasound was introduced in 1992. From the start it had a high-quality wave table music synthesizer that uploaded instruments onto the card as needed, from disk. Although its Sound Blaster compatibility was only fair, it was a hit with consumers and developers and was well-supported for the remainder of the DOS era.

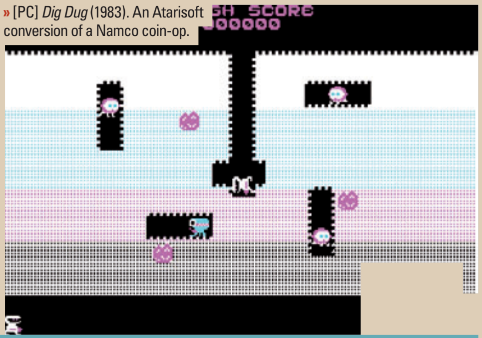




» [PC] *Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design* had CGA, EGA and VGA versions, as shown here.



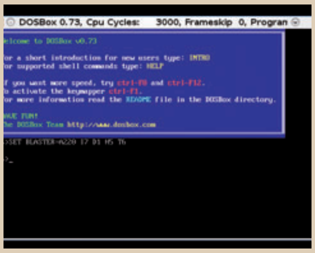
» [PC] *Abuse* (1996). The mouse control, real-time lighting and constant carnage give it real flavour.



» [PC] *Dig Dug* (1983). An Atarisoft conversion of a Namco coin-op.

PC EMULATION WITH DOSBOX

Although every effort has been made to maintain backwards compatibility in PC design, more than 25 years of development has taken its toll. Along with other problems, modern computers often run far too fast for some old games, and old sound cards won't run on modern hardware. In addition, modern versions of Windows simply won't allow old software complete freedom to access all of the hardware. Fortunately, there exists a very good vintage PC emulator called DOSBox (**www.dosbox.com**). The command-driven nature of the program does add a bit of complexity to loading games, but it's worth persevering as it can emulate a number of different hardware standards. It also includes an all-important facility to slow down the emulator for games that are sensitive to execution speed. Overall, DOSBox provides very accurate and flexible emulation. Just remember that the Ctrl-F10 key combination releases the mouse.



> "Each generation of PCs revealed developers that had failed to anticipate a newer, faster PC"

of rigorous backwards compatibility would become a cornerstone of the PC platform until the present day.

One snag that cropped up with the second generation of PCs was that a lot of older games ran too quickly. Some PC makers tried to get around this with the addition of a 'turbo' button on the front of the computer case. Actually, the labelling was somewhat misleading, as the function of the turbo button was to slow the computer down. It's a problem that dogged the PC throughout the entire DOS era, as each generation of new PCs revealed software developers that had failed to anticipate a newer, faster generation.

Game pads were available, but most PC joysticks were of the analogue type, which were more suited to control of simulators. The speed problem reared its head here, too, as joystick support suffered from calibration problems on faster computers. To work around this, many games offered a calibration feature, and most of the best joysticks featured trim controls for the same reason. Not every PC owner had a joystick – or even a joystick port, for that matter – so nearly all games could be played from the keyboard, defaulting to the cursor keys.

Platform games weren't an area of gaming that PC was well-known for, and although the PC's hardware wasn't very suited to them, some interesting platform games do exist. Making use of shareware distribution, *Duke Nukem* and *Commander Keen* are the most famous franchises in this genre. *Commander Keen* was programmed by 3D graphics legend John Carmack and proved to be an early episodic success for Apogee, having started life as a clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. Softdisk, the company that later became Apogee and then 3D Realms, presented the demo to Nintendo. The Nintendo executives were impressed by Carmack's technical achievement but the company remained uninterested in entering the PC games market. Nothing was wasted, however, as Carmack and co reused the engine for *Commander Keen*.

One advantage that the PC had over its rivals was the fact that it was so flexible, and a huge industry of component makers and system builders sprung up around the PC. Even end users would often get in on the act, either building from scratch or customising an existing system. The downside was that game developers were unable to test every possible hardware combination on the market, and this sometimes led to software incompatibilities.

By the time that 286s were common, most PCs had a hard disk drive fitted and it became a requirement of most games. Naturally, that added a bit to the cost of the computer, but it was worth it for the improved speed and convenience. It was also around this time that PCs started to be sold with Microsoft Windows installed as standard, giving the user a graphical way of managing files and launching games. A few games could take advantage of early versions of Windows, but until Windows 95 and Pentium class machines became common, the majority were pure DOS games that merely ran under Windows.

The 386 Era

In 1986, it was Compaq rather than IBM that introduced the first PC based around the Intel 80386 processor. IBM soon followed suit, demonstrating the benefits to the consumer of a competitive marketplace. The early 386 machines offered a huge speed boost, although the high cost of the first



» [PC] Set in the *BattleTech* universe, *MechWarrior 2* (1995) was an action game that required a bit of thought.

EIGHT IMPORTANT DOS GAMES



KING'S QUEST: QUEST FOR THE CROWN

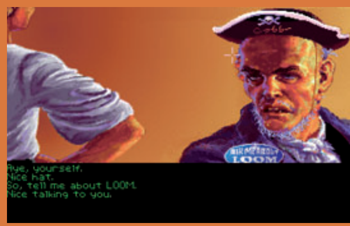
» Released: 1985
» Publisher: Sierra
» Developer: In-House
» By the same developer: *Leisure Suit Larry* (1987)

■ *King's Quest* modernised the adventure game by combining real-time graphics with text input. Its success set the tone for many other Sierra adventure games such as the *Space Quest*, *Police Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry* series of games as well as the adventure game genre in general. The increasingly large installed base of PCs provided a ready market for high-quality games that required a bit of thought. A trick squeezed 16 on-screen colours out of a CGA card with suitable monitor.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

» Released: 1990
» Publisher: Lucasfilm Games
» Developer: In-House
» By the same developer: *Maniac Mansion: Day Of The Tentacle* (1993)

■ Other games had featured the occasional funny moment, but adventure game *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was truly hilarious and set a new standard for everything that followed. The use of anachronistic references added to the humour, and apart from the jokes, accessibility was a driving factor behind the design that did away with manual text entry entirely. The player character could not die and more than one puzzle could be worked on simultaneously, both of which reduced the frustration that sometimes marred traditional adventures.





WING COMMANDER

» Released: 1990
» Publisher: Origin Systems
» Developer: In-House
» By the same developer: *System Shock* (1994)

■ This mission-based space shooter raised the bar for cinematic atmosphere and storytelling within an action game. The game attempted to recreate the atmosphere of film space epics such as *Star Wars*, putting the player in the thick of the action. The cinematic feel extended to the musical score and the animated cut-scenes that progressed the story. The hardware requirements were crushing at the time of release, and this was one of the first high-end games that would cause people to upgrade their hardware simply to play it.

WOLFENSTEIN 3D

» Released: 1992
» Publisher: Apogee Software
» Developer: id Software
» By the same developer: *Crystal Caves* (1991)

■ *Wolfenstein 3D* was the game that really kick-started the FPS (first-person shooter) craze on the PC. There had been earlier FPSs, but *Wolfenstein 3D* laid out the blueprint for the games that would follow and it did so brilliantly. John Carmack did what he does best by creating a game engine that is fast and slick looking. In the game, the player moves through level after level of Nazi soldiers, dispatching them with a variety of weapons that are gradually gained as the player progresses. A landmark title by any standards.

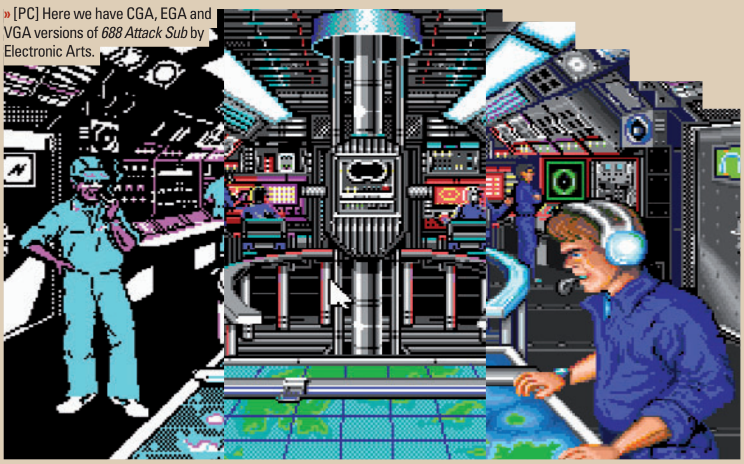


models stopped them from becoming regarded as an entry-level machine until the beginning of the Nineties.

In less than a decade, the PC had become one of the most important platforms, which was quite a switch from the early days when PC owners had to make do with ports from the other machines. With the PC beginning to dominate the high end and consoles covering the action-oriented titles and youth market, the Nineties saw a decline of traditional home computers.

Games like *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* (1990) were PC titles that were then ported to other platforms following the PC release. Real-time strategy game *Dune II* (1992) is a good example of an early Nineties PC game that went on to be adapted for other platforms. Another significant aspect of games like these is that they relied on a clear separation between the game engine and content. Many PC genre hits are like applications such as web browsers in that later games are merely improved versions of the earlier games. For this reason, it might be difficult for a new player to fully appreciate something like *Dune II* or *Doom*, as similar but greatly improved modern games of those types exist.

IBM introduced the VGA graphics standard in 1987, and by the time the decade came to a close, a 386 PC with VGA graphics and a sound card was the best platform money could buy for gamers who enjoyed a more serious style of gameplay. In the same way that the hi-fi revolution of the Seventies had created a demand for more technically advanced musical recordings, PC gamers who had invested money in a high-end gaming rig demanded games that made the most of their hardware. Space combat game *Wing Commander* (1990) is a consummate example of a game that offered a cinematic experience for people who were prepared to shell out for a top-level machine. Another improvement of the platform was the move away from floppy disks to CD-ROM.



» [PC] Here we have CGA, EGA and VGA versions of *688 Attack Sub* by Electronic Arts.

The 486, the Pentium, and the end of DOS gaming

In 1989 Intel introduced the i486 processor, and like the other CPUs, it took a few years before complete PCs using it were commonplace. Notice that Intel had stopped issuing chip names that were simply a number at this point; by now other manufacturers were making very competitive clones of the Intel chips, and the company had discovered that it was unable to legally trademark a number. This is the reason that the successor to the 486 was called the Pentium.

It's worth noting that the pace of PC hardware development has always been constant, in contrast to manufacturers of home computers such as Acorn and Commodore, which would sometimes go years without a major new development. One thing was certain: if the users were willing to continue to buy





DUNE II

» **Released:** 1992
» **Publisher:** Westwood Studios
» **Developer:** In-House
» **By the same developer:** *Eye Of The Beholder* (1990)

■ Nearly every real-time strategy game that followed it owes something to *Dune II,* including Westwood's very own *Command & Conquer.* It's the game that ratified the mechanisms for things like resource gathering, fog of war, technology trees and the control of units. It's also responsible for pulling in people who weren't traditionally fans of strategy games. Victory after hours of bitterly fought warfare and looking out of the window to notice that it was getting light outside became frequent companions thanks to this groundbreaker.

DUKE NUKEM 3D

» **Released:** 1996
» **Publisher:** Apogee Software
» **Created by:** 3D Realms
» **By the same developer:** *Terminal Velocity* (1995)

■ Like *Wolfenstein 3D, Duke Nukem 3D* was a first-person shooter entry to an existing 2D PC franchise. While the games of id Software concentrated on stripped-down gameplay, *Duke Nukem 3D* retained some of the complexity of the earlier generation of games with transporters, jet packs, triggered bombs and realistic environments. These factors kept *Duke Nukem 3D* competitive against games like *Quake,* which had an arguably more technologically advanced rendering engine. Hail to the king indeed.





FALLOUT

» **Released:** 1997
» **Publisher:** Interplay
» **Developer:** Black Isle Studios
» **By the same developer:** *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* (1992)

■ Isometric RPG *Fallout* is known for its post-apocalyptic setting, dark humour and branching plotlines. While journeying through the enormous game world, the player is given an unusual amount of freedom to make moral choices. Do you do the right thing, or take the easy way out? Are you a smooth-talking con man or is violence a quicker route through life? The turn-based combat adds a strategic element to a game that is as much adventure game as RPG. A truly excellent experience that needs to be played by everyone.

GRAND THEFT AUTO

» **Released:** 1997
» **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
» **Created by:** DMA Design
» **By the same developer:** *Lemmings* (1991)

■ *Grand Theft Auto* was one of the final major releases to support DOS and it even made use of 3D acceleration for owners of 3DFX cards. The secret of its success is that it blends lots of different elements together, but does so very well. For example, it is basically a 2D game but it makes use of 3D graphics. In the same way, the game at first seems quite old school, belying the complex sandbox environment and emergent gameplay. A lump of good old-fashioned controversy didn't hurt, of course. Yet another highly successful PC franchise.



faster and more powerful computers, developers were willing to produce games that would push the machines to the limit. The extra processing power had impact on two main areas of PC gaming: multimedia and real-time 3D graphics. Games like *Command & Conquer* (1995) made use of multimedia by filming story-advancing cut-scenes with real actors.

However, it was the success of games like *Doom* (1993) that brought about the biggest change in gaming since the start of the personal computer revolution: the move to 3D. The Sega Saturn was a significant commercial disappointment during this period mainly because the switch to 3D caught it out, as it wasn't very good at it. Most graphics card manufacturers made their own extensions to the basic VGA standard, and these were collectively referred to as SVGA. Some games began to offer high-definition play modes, although support was sometimes awkward because, as with sound cards, there was no single standard. SVGA support improved the look of games and offered substantial benefits to games such as *Warcraft II* (1995) or *Fallout* (1997). Games like this would have been less enjoyable to play on the consoles of the time due to the lack of a mouse, clear graphics and a hard disk drive.



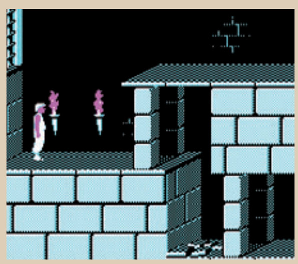
If there was a downside to the final era of DOS gaming, it was that, as the capabilities continued to improve, the cost of asset creation substantially increased. At the start of the PC, bedroom coders were still able to make and sell games, but by the time that most PCs had a Pentium-class processor, huge teams of designers, actors, directors, musicians and many other creative people worked together to create games at a cost of millions of pounds. This meant that the corporations that financed the games could no longer afford to take risks, and this led to homogenisation. When one game was a big success, a set of very similar games was sure to follow on the PC.

By the time that PCs powered by Pentium-class processors were commonplace, nearly all users were running a combination of Windows and DOS software at the same time. Some games such as *Fallout* and *Grand Theft Auto* came with DOS and Windows versions on the same disk. But as we said, unlike a lot of explorations of a retro platform, this one doesn't have a sad ending. DOS and Windows gaming continued to live side by side for a number of years and gaming on the PC continued to improve.

So, next time you marvel at the latest PC blockbuster, remember that the first PC could only manage four colours at once and was far from being a winner in the games department.

PC GRAPHICS STANDARDS

CGA (COLOR GRAPHICS ADAPTOR – 1981)



CGA was IBM's first attempt at a colour graphics standard. As it wasn't designed with gaming in mind, it lacked facilities such as sprites or smooth scrolling. The most common gaming mode consisted of 320x200 pixels and a fixed palette of either cyan and magenta or blue or red, green and yellow plus one definable colour. In 1984, Boy George wasn't the only person dreaming in red, gold and green. For better or worse, these limitations gave CGA graphics a look that was instantly recognisable.

EGA (ENHANCED GRAPHICS ADAPTOR – 1984)

Things began to perk up for PC gamers when IBM introduced the EGA standard. EGA allowed a total of 16 on-screen colours from a palette of 64; an improvement over CGA but still slightly gaudy-looking. The most common gaming mode had 320x200 pixels, although some higher resolutions were available. EGA was entirely backwards compatible with CGA.



VGA (VIRTUAL GRAPHICS ADAPTOR – 1987)



CGA was garish, EGA was decent, but with the introduction of VGA, IBM PC compatibles started to pull ahead of most other platforms of the time. Like CGA and EGA, the setup was simple as there were no fancy sprites or other hardware trickery of competing platforms such as those by Commodore or Atari. For gamers, the appeal of VGA lay in its excellently specified 256-colour mode that had access to a palette of 262,144 colours. VGA was backwards compatible with CGA and EGA.

WHY YOU MUST PLAY...

YIE AR KUNG-FU



[Arcade] *Yie Ar* laid down a lot of the foundations for the one-on-one fighting genre – too many to list in this caption.



[Arcade] 'Yie Ar' translates as 'One Two', making the sequel *Yie Ar Kung-Fu Ar*.



[Arcade] *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* was re-released in 1997 on *Konami Antiques MSX Collection*.

OLDER THAN TREASURE MAPS BUT FAR LESS BROWN, YIE AR KUNG-FU IS STILL KONAMI'S BEST STAB AT THE BEAT-'EM-UP GENRE, SO SAYS STUART HUNT… THOUGH RAKUGA KIDS COMES PRETTY DARN CLOSE



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £150-£250

Thanks to *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*'s unique approach to its genre, it remains a great fighting game to play even today. At the time of its release, most fighting games were very simplistic, and often went for simulation over personality; a formula that would switch after the release of Capcom's seminal brawler, *Street Fighter II*. *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* was clearly ahead of its time and was undoubtedly an important milestone for the evolution of the fighting game.

Injecting itself with a heavy dose of variety, and boasting a unique art style that made its fighters resemble balloon animals, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* effortlessly stood out from the more serious-looking fighters that it shared arcades with. In fact, there are many points of difference that separate *Yie Ar* from its peers, and even successive beat-'em-ups for that matter.

The first thing you may notice about *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is that instead of a colourful roster of memorable and varied characters to choose from, the game forces you to play as just one… and a pretty forgettable one at that. Sporting a Beatles mop and Popeye attire, Oolong certainly wasn't the coolest-looking character to ever grace the fighting genre, but he did have a certain Jackie Chan appearance and charm about him. And Konami can be praised for blessing Oolong with a surprising number of moves – especially from just two buttons: punch and kick – by having attacks performed by stabbing at either fire button while simultaneously pressing the joystick in one of eight directions.

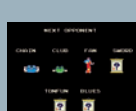
Second, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is split into two tournaments: the somewhat camp-sounding 'Hot Fighting' and what sounds like a BBC quiz in 'Masterhand', and both sit comfortably on the shoulders of unfair pugilism. All of Oolong's opponents, save for his first challenger – the blind cave salamander lookalike Buchu – are tooled up to the nines with weapons ranging from throwing stars and poles to nunchucks – and Buchu can even fly, although we can't really classify flight as a weapon – whereas poor old Oolong had just his feet and fists with which to floor his opponents. Another interesting fact about the enemies in the game is that most of their names relate to the signature weapon they carry, which means that throughout the competition you get to face off against people called

WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE



EIGHT-WAY COMBAT X 2

Yie Ar utilised an eight-way combat system, whereby pressing either punch or kick with a direction on the joystick would perform a move.



CHARACTER HEAVY!

Ironically, *Yie Ar* has a fulsome roster, all with wacky names and various cool-looking weapons, but you can't control any of them.



BLOCKING? WHAT'S THAT?

Fear does not exist in this dojo, does it? No, Sensei! Co-op does not exist in this dojo, does it? No, Sensei! You get the idea.



FIRM BUT FAIR

Thanks to the tiny hit boxes, you have to hit your opponent with pinpoint accuracy. While it makes the game a pig at first, once mastered it's a joy.

INFLUENCES

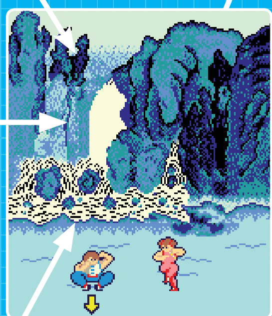
The games that influenced and have been influenced by **Yie Ar Kung-Fu**

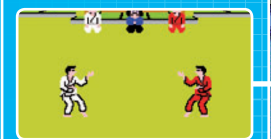


■ KUNG-FU MASTER
Yie Ar shared the same colourful pastel tones of Irem's classic, and some of the character designs look similar too.



■ WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
It borrows much from *Karate Champ*, therefore *Way Of The Exploding Fist* shares quite a lot of similarities with *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*.

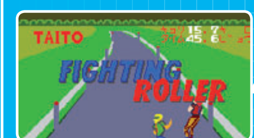




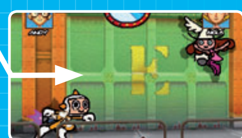
■ KARATE CHAMP
Undeniably a strong influence for *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Karate Champ* featured similar controls and a sedate point-based scoring system.



■ SOUL CALIBUR
Yie Ar Kung-Fu pioneered weapon-based fighting games, and *Soul Calibur* is up there with the very best in the modern day.



■ FIGHTING ROLLER
Possibly the earliest example of an 'fighting' game. Which, considering that it plays like a mixture of *DJ Boy* and *Road Rash*, always surprises us.



■ RAKUGA KIDS
Making the list by default, it's another good and under-appreciated 2D beat-'em-up from Konami, this time released for the N64.

"Yie Ar Kung-Fu stood out from its more serious-looking competition"

Pole, Chain, Fan and Sword… which is odd but slightly brilliant.

However, what bugs some people about *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is its unforgiving combat. There is absolutely no blocking in the game, and coupling this with Oolong's overzealous-feeling jump – seemingly inspired by high-wire martial arts movies – and the infinitesimally small collision boxes that sit invisibly on his opponents makes for a very frantic and difficult game to master. However, you may notice that there is a very slight pause that occurs in the game whenever a successful hit is landed, and whether intentional or not, this offers a great moment for players to register where collisions are made and help them to master *Yie Ar*'s pernickety but highly rewarding combat system.

While the home computer versions of *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* – save for the MSX version – played things incredibly close to the arcade game, the console version, which was developed by Konami, featured new sprites, new characters including a brand new hero called Lee Young, and a few new moves too. This version was released on the NES, Game Boy Color, and later on the PlayStation and Saturn via *Konami Antiques MSX Collection*.

The final game in the *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* series is *Yie Ar Kung-Fu II: The Emperor Yie-Gah*, and was a continuation of Konami's home port rather than the original arcade game. It ousted Oolong again for Lee Young but was notable for adding a two-player mode that allowed players to control one of the first three boss fighters. It also featured these weird preliminary side-scrolling bits that found Lee fighting his way through three screens of angry tiny ninja babies before coming up against the main bosses, and threw in power-ups that fell from the ceiling and offered additional extra health and temporary invincibility. Oddly, the game was never released on the NES, and instead only found its way to 8-bit microcomputers, with the MSX port widely regarded as being the best version. The sequel also later appeared on the Saturn and PlayStation on *Konami Antiques MSX Collection Vol 2*.

So there you have it: a very brief history of *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* in two pages. We guess all that's left to say is Oolong and goodbye [Good grief – ED].

THE CONVERSIONS

How the various versions compare



1 COMMODORE 64

BEST VERSION

One of the best arcade ports available on the C64, this version, with incredible visuals, fantastic sound, and slick gameplay, ticks every box. Our only minor gripe is that the character sprites feel less cartoony than the CPC port, but that's us being picky jerks.



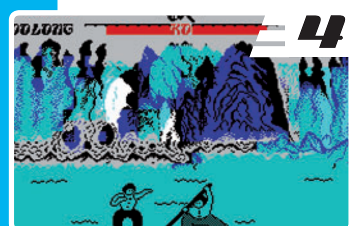
2 NES

The home console versions of *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* were handled by Konami and differ from the Imagine versions. It features similar gameplay but adds new fighters, a new hero and a few new moves. It's a good version but doesn't feel enough like the arcade game for our liking.



3 AMSTRAD CPC

Arnold turns out a pretty good effort. The game benefits immensely from the machine's love of bright, colourful visuals, giving it an authentic look compared to the arcade. And the gameplay, while a bit on the sluggish side, is no game breaker. Completists will moan that this version is missing a fighter, however.



4 ZX SPECTRUM

While colour clash rarely rears its head in this game as the tiny fighters are firmly plonked at the base of the screen, the gameplay moves slowly and the fighters do this odd shake whenever they're hit, which can be distracting. Not a great port, to be honest.

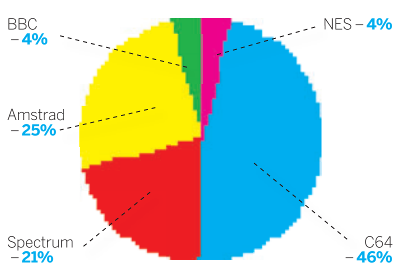


5 BBC MICRO

WORST VERSION

This version doesn't look bad but the combat feels flighty, with the unforgiving collision detection that the arcade is famous for rendered non-existent. Most fights can be won by furiously bashing buttons, which certainly isn't what *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is all about.

FORUM OPINION



"Whilst I love the Speccy conversion, I recall playing the Beeb conversion and being jealous of the colour. Great stuff."
– neuromancer

"C64 for me. Great graphics and over-the-top sounds, a diverse range of fighters, and in a single load."
– TheDude18



Neil Brennan
- **Age:** 45
- **Occupation:** Senior software engineer
- **URL:** majitek.com
- **Favourite composition:** *Samurai Warrior/ Usagi Yojimbo*
- **All-time favourite SID:** "Anything by Rob Hubbard"
- **Favourite record:** *The White Album* (The Beatles)



Ben Daglish
- **Age:** 43
- **Occupation:** Musician and programmer
- **URL:** ben-daglish.net
- **Favourite composition:** *Trap*
- **All-time favourite SID:** *Masters Of Magic*
- **Favourite record:** *Domino Theory* (Weather Report)



Jonathan Dunn
- **Age:** 41
- **Occupation:** Executive producer
- **Favourite composition:** *Total Recall* (title)
- **All-time favourite SID:** *Spellbound*
- **Favourite record:** *Backfired* (Masters at Work)



Martin Galway
- **Age:** 43
- **Occupation:** Freelance audio director
- **Favourite composition:** *Wizball* (title)
- **All-time favourite SID:** *One Man And His Droid*
- **Favourite record:** *The Flat Earth* (Thomas Dolby)



Fred Gray
- **Age:** 55
- **Occupation:** Care worker/admin worker
- **Favourite composition:** *Madballs* (title)
- **All-time favourite SID:** *Sanxion* (sub-tune 2)
- **Favourite record:** *Wish You Were Here* (Pink Floyd)

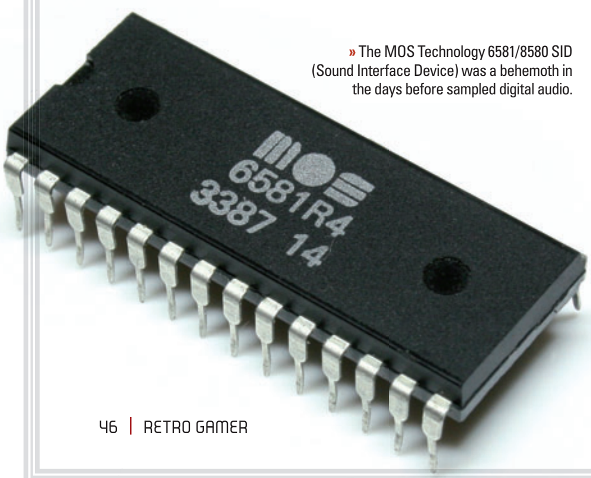


Jon Hare
- **Age:** 43
- **Occupation:** Games designer
- **Favourite composition:** *Oh No!*
- **All-time favourite SID:** *Parallax*
- **Favourite record:** *Everyone Is Everybody Else* (Barclay James Harvest)



The SID

The SID chip was revolutionary, and the musicians that made it sing laid the foundation for modern videogame music. Craig Grannell rounds up a dozen SID stars to find out their thoughts on the evolution of SID music



» The MOS Technology 6581/8580 SID (Sound Interface Device) was a behemoth in the days before sampled digital audio.

In the battle for 8-bit supremacy, the SID chip became the C64's main weapon. While other platforms offered more speed or better graphics than Commodore's bread bin, the SID brought the earliest examples of high-quality videogame music to home gaming. As the years went by, relatively simple ditties gave way to hugely complex compositions, created by programmers and musicians that became 8-bit celebrities: Hubbard, Galway, Whittaker, Huelsbeck and many others. A great soundtrack could sell a game, and, increasingly, the SID sold the platform, with gamers drawn to its chip-tune charms. Rather than tell the story of SID ourselves, this feature brings together 12 top talents from the C64 days, who reveal their memories about how they laid the groundwork for videogame soundtracks for years to come.

Why was the SID chip great?

Rob Hubbard: It was one of the first sound chips, and music evolved as the games were being pioneered. A whole culture developed around the C64 and the people involved with it.

Martin Galway: It was the most advanced sound synthesiser of its time, had unique features not found elsewhere, and was designed with an approach completely different to its rivals, which gave it a unique sound quality.

Chris Huelsbeck: The designers upped the ante, going beyond the norm, which was a cheesy digital style put into early arcade machines and computers. Yannes wanted to create a real synth, and he went on to build synths for Ensoniq. I recall he'd originally planned to put eight SIDs into a case with a keyboard, but it came out too noisy, but Commodore jumped on it. The design had a real filter, three oscillators, and sounded so much better than anything that had come before.



Rob Hubbard
- » **Age:** 53
- » **Occupation:** Musician
- » **Favourite composition:** *Sanxion*
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Rambo*
- » **Favourite record:** "Too many to list"



Chris Huelsbeck
- » **Age:** 41
- » **Occupation:** Videogame composer/ sound designer
- » **URL:** huelsbeck.com
- » **Favourite composition:** *Starball*
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Monty On The Run*
- » **Favourite record:** *Please* (Pet Shop Boys)



Graham 'The Mighty Bogg' Marsh
- » **Age:** 43
- » **Occupation:** Electronics test engineer (team leader)
- » **Favourite composition:** Bits of different tunes
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Aztec Challenge*
- » **Favourite record:** *Dirty Boy* (Cardiacs)



Reyn Ouwehand
- » **Age:** 36
- » **Occupation:** Record producer
- » **URL:** reyn.net
- » **Favourite composition:** *Deadlock*
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Nightdawn* (sub-tune 2)
- » **Favourite record:** *OK Computer* (Radiohead)



Martin Walker
- » **Age:** "Stopped counting"
- » **Occupation:** Composer, sound designer, technical writer
- » **URL:** yewtreemagic.co.uk
- » **Favourite composition:** *Armalyte* (title)
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Delta* (in-game)
- » **Favourite record:** *Close To The Edge* (Yes)



Dave 'DialogueGuru' Whittaker
- » **Age:** Old
- » **Occupation:** Head of audio, Traveller's Tales
- » **URL:** ttgames.com
- » **Favourite composition:** *Glider Rider*
- » **All-time favourite SID:** *Master Of Magic*
- » **Favourite record:** *Equinoxe* (Jean Michel Jarre)



Ben Daglish: It was the first sound chip you could do groovy things with. Before that, you got a square wave with a bit of an envelope, but with SID you've got all sorts of lovely sounds. It was my first proper electronic instrument and was groundbreaking.
Jon Hare: The C64 was the first games machine that could make anything that sounded even remotely like music. It had a unique sound of its own, which made it seem very futuristic at the time. It's the biggest leap in videogame sound I can remember.
Graham Marsh: I liked having three voices built in. Previously, I'd used the Spectrum and had to use an add-on box to do proper chords. The SID improved games no end – just play *Castle Of Terror* to feel the atmosphere good sound and music can create. *Aztec Challenge* used music progressively – the further you got, the more the music developed, which is a great device and a good incentive to keep playing!
Neil Brennan: It was certainly a relative joy to compose for the SID 'beepatron' after the horrible deficiencies of the Z80's 'clickatron'. White noise, filters, ring mod… all lovely. I would have killed for one more channel, though.
Martin Walker: It could be frustrating working within the SID's limitations, but that's what taught you to make the most of what you had – good advice generally in life! For me, the most special aspect of the SID was its ring modulation and sync features, which allowed me to create metallic, 'speech-like' sound effects, such as the 'Meanwhile!' so many gamers commented on in *Hunter's Moon*.
Fred Gray: At first, I was more intrigued with the C64's sprites, and so my original music driver didn't fully exploit the SID's capabilities. It wasn't until I heard amazing things others were doing that I decided to write a more comprehensive driver. I always thought gameplay was the most important part of a game, but the SID intensified this with music. A good example is in the *Mutants* maze – it's like having a clock ticking in your brain. I think all SID programmers aimed to play psychological games with their listeners, especially Martin Galway with his moody pitch bends and thumping beats.

How did you get into C64 music?

MG: I was working on the BBC Micro, which was used in schools. I didn't think much of the C64 – it was, by comparison, bereft of support for easy programming. But Ocean's development manager David Collier shoved a C64 in my face and said, 'Program for this instead!' I guess I was obliged at that point!
RH: I had a strong background in analogue synths and started playing music when I was a kid. I started doing games and eventually specialised in audio, since most of it was so bad.
BD: I was at school with Tony Crowther, and he asked me for the music to the death march for a game. I

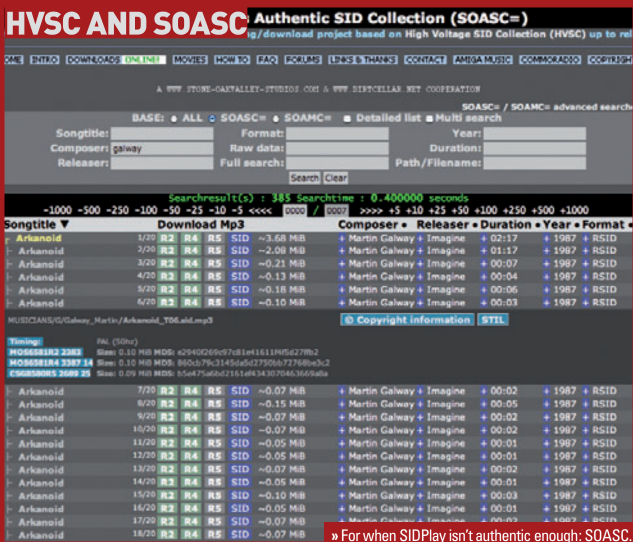


"We laid the groundwork for videogame sound. That it's still honoured is a testament to what we did" *Chris Huelsbeck*

The SID Crowd

PLAYBACK

HVSC AND SOASC



» For when SIDPlay isn't authentic enough: SOASC.

For SID playback, SIDPlay is suitable for most, but emulation isn't entirely accurate. Binary Zone (**binaryzone.org**) offers CDs of SID recordings, but Stein Eikesdal's Stone Oakvalley's Authentic SID Collection (**www.6581-8580.com**) aims to offer the High Voltage SID Collection (**hvsc.c64.org**) in MP3 format. "The project records SIDs on real C64s, with no attempts to improve the sound, bar subtle noise reduction," says Stein. "The result is a 150,000-plus MP3 archive of music."

Stein says his aim was to provide the "sound as it would have appeared if you connected a C64 to a modern audio system", and although he'd been happy with SIDPlay, he changed his mind in 2006: "I found a site that showed the severe differences between emulation and real hardware, and this made me search for more authentic recordings." On discovering that no one had converted the HVSC, he did it himself.

EPIC SOUNDTRACKS



» [C64] *Miami Vice*: epic soundtrack; awful game.

Many SIDs were short loops and ditties due to memory limitations, but by utilising cunning looping techniques or applying lengthy soundtracks to relatively simple C64 games, SID musicians occasionally unleashed an epic. Hubbard's fantastic Pink Floyd-inspired 12-minute in-game *Delta* soundtrack remains a stunning piece, regardless of its chip-tune nature, and it isn't alone. Galway's ambient *Miami Vice* and intense *Parallax*, Matt Gray's filmic *Driller*, and Wally Beben's 26-minute piece for *Tetris* stand out from the crowd. And then there's the *Last Ninja* series – while its tunes are only a few minutes long, they helped in making the games seem like more than they were.

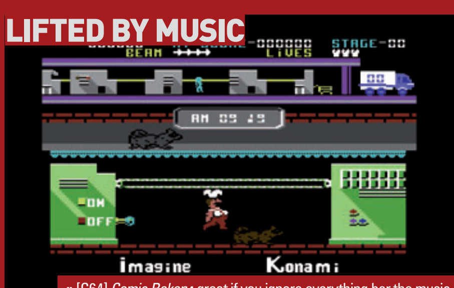
SAMPLE CITY



» [C64] *Turbo Outrun* offers a successful mix of samples and SID.

At the time, samples proved divisive, with some SID composers considering them a technical feat, but not one with any real musical merit. Today, the low fidelity of C64 samples sticks out like a sore thumb, but top composers nonetheless managed to use the technique to add to their SIDs in a meaningful manner. Witness Hubbard's rocking guitars in *Arcade Classics* and *Skate Or Die*, the crunchy percussion in Galway's *Arkanoid*, the loops behind the SID in Huelsbeck's *To Be On Top*, and Jeroen Tel's funky, sample-infused *Magical Sound Shower* update for *Turbo Outrun*. All great examples of SIDs where samples add character rather than detract from the synth sounds.

LIFTED BY MUSIC



» [C64] *Comic Bakery*: great if you ignore everything bar the music.

As Ben Daglish notes, C64 music was appreciated, and sometimes a composer's output could be so good that people would buy games primarily for their soundtracks. Hubbard classics graced iffy arcade conversion *Commando*, the mediocre *Knucklebusters*, budget failure *Rasputin* and rubbish shoot-'em-up *WAR*, lifting these turkeys from the mire. And even with divisive games like *Delta*, gamers tend to agree that Hubbard's music is sublime. Similarly, Galway's sterling efforts for Ocean ensured that *Miami Vice*, *Comic Bakery* and *Highlander* weren't complete disasters. Luckily, anyone today with a hankering to play these tunes can circumvent the games and just load the music in SIDPlay.

COVER VERSIONS



» [C64] *Exploding Fist*'s main theme is based on *Dance Of The Yao People*.

C64 game tunes often 'appropriated' tunes by chart-topping acts and synth legends like Jarre. Some covers, however, are more obscure. Daglish's popular *Cobra* theme, for example, is taken from the movie, and the main theme from Neil Brennan's *Exploding Fist* is lifted from *Dance Of The Yao People* from Phases of the Moon. Many famous Hubbard tracks are also borderline covers: *Delta* is Philip Glass's *Koyaanisqatsi* sped up, *International Karate* borrows from Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, and *Zoids* and *Master Of Magic* are based on Synergy tracks. However, due to the nature of the SID and C64 composers, even these tracks take on a life of their own.

wrote out the notes and he then asked for some Jarre. I started thinking I could write stuff myself – and I did.

Dave Whittaker: I started with making VIC-20 games and progressed to other major formats, eventually specialising in just audio.

FG: As I was discovering the C64, I was also trying to sell VIC-20 games to Tim Best. He liked the mood of my crude games, which he said was down to the music. One day, he told me to forget the VIC-20 and that we were off to Imagine – he wanted me on board to compose music for C64 games. I became an in-house music programmer, and it was a dream come true. All the musical experience I had at that time was with cheesy cabaret bands, but I loved music and programming. It was easier than playing live and I got to show off my creativity.

MW: I'd done some programming at university and had six C64 games published. But I'd been a musician for years before getting the programming bug, and so I created music and effects for my games. It seemed a natural progression to offer those services to others.

Jonathan Dunn: I was at college studying music and programming, and I combined the two things, sending demos to publishers. Before I knew it, I was getting commissioned and got an in-house job at Ocean. Initially, I intended to go to university a year later, but I never went.

Reyn Ouwehand: I'm not a programmer, and so it was SoundTracker that got me hooked, years after Hubbard was done making his classics. I was involved with demo groups – Blackmail, Scoop Designs – and through them I got hooked up with System 3 and Boys Without Brains, which led to commercial work.

CH: I always loved synth music and wanted my own synth, but my family couldn't afford one. I was also interested in videogames, read about the C64, and was taken in by the description of the sound chip. It took a year to get the machine, and my gran gave me the last 50 bucks! Soon after I started programming, a friend needed sound for his new game, *Planet Of War*, and so I worked on that.

What were your main influences?

RH: I had many musical influences from all kinds of things, but there was a lot of electronic synth pop music in the Eighties that everyone copied.

NB: I was heavily interested by David Sylvian's band Japan at the time – and yes, it really shows!

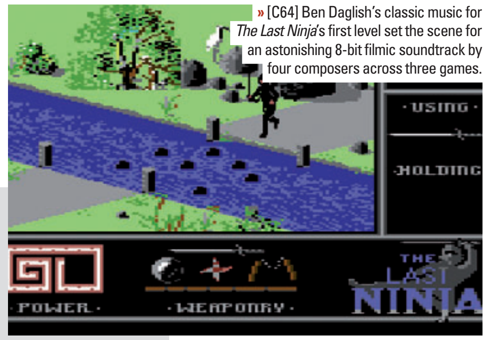
MG: I spent my formative musical years listening to loads of electronic music, such as Jarre, Tangerine Dream and Thomas Dolby. This affected my compositions, although as I'd I grown up listening to rock and roll and enjoyed fiddly guitar solos, it was natural for me to try to emulate those too.

BD: My parents ran a folk club, and as a baby I was famously bounced on the knee of various folk luminaries. I played in orchestras and listened to lots of heavy metal in my teens, and then electronic stuff. It all sort of merged together. You do make distinctions between genres and styles, but it's all notes, really. And that's part of being a professional musician: you do what the job calls for. But I suppose 'orchestrally folky' was my natural state.

MW: My main influence was the SID chip itself, since this determined what I could write.

RO: I was raised in a very 'amusical' household, and my influence was mostly what other SID musicians did. I also think the SID's sound was very significant. It really has its own style and





» [C64] Ben Daglish's classic music for *The Last Ninja*'s first level set the scene for an astonishing 8-bit filmic soundtrack by four composers across three games.

"I had many musical influences from all kinds of things, but there was a lot of electronic synth pop music in the Eighties that everyone copied" *Rob Hubbard*



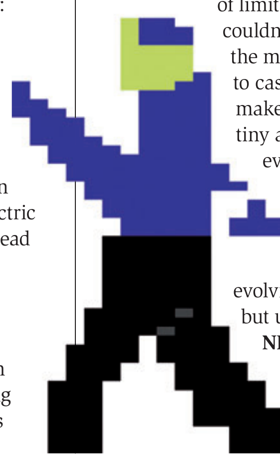
can sound so funky – and the phrasing of melodies is so SID.
GM: My first *Bogg Album* was cover versions of chart songs, but *Bogg Album 2* was all original stuff. I was listening to Depeche Mode, John Foxx, Gary Numan and Human League, so was influenced by them. I suppose my music had a certain style. I liked to mess around with odd chord changes, or weird out completely with ring mods. Music has to be stimulating for me to listen to it and I'm always trying to work out what's going on. Once I work it out, I'm bored with it.
FG: I can't say I had many influences, although I did like to borrow from the classics – I owe Bizet big time for *Foxx Fights Back*! But most of my music was purely me: I'd get a tune in my head and work on it, sometimes for days, trying to get it how I heard it in my head. Sometimes I'd strip them down into small, repetitive tunes for high-score tables. But I must admit Mike Oldfield inspired the *Mutants* main tune!

Did you consider the SID a synth, or were you trying to ape real-world instruments in your compositions?

FG: I often imagined orchestral pieces or rock arrangements, but rarely tried to emulate individual instruments – the SID chip had a sound all of its own.
NB: The SID is pretty limited. I loved synths when they sounded like new instruments you hadn't heard of yet, but I was never satisfied by what we got on the C64. It didn't help that every C64 seemed to have its own unique filter values. There can't have been much quality control in the SID chip factory!
DW: I just treated it as a restricted synth – you couldn't really emulate any 'real' instruments.
MW: Drums were feasible by changing between noise and other waveforms 'on the fly', but in general the sounds were out and out synth-like in nature, so I went with the flow. Given that most games were futuristic shoot-'em-ups, synth music was the perfect choice anyway.
BD: I went for trying to get 'realish' instrument sounds, but there were definitely two camps: people like me, and those into pure SID. Often, those sounds became the basis of a piece, but I'm into notes. I don't care what they're played on. Generally, I'd come up with the tune and notes, then play with settings until everything sounded halfway decent. The one exception was *Deflektor*: I came up with a really nice cowbell sound and decided I had to write a piece around it. 'TOK TOK TOK-N-TOK!' You gotta do something with that, right?
JH: What was great about the SID was it being a crossover instrument between techie bleeps and regular electro-synth music. It's interesting in the SID'80s band I play in that Mark Knight's electric violin sounds close in tone to some of the synth lead voices used by C64 composers.

What process did you use when composing?

RH: I played most of the games and then used an assembler program and typed everything in using database statements. I used my own code – I was one of the first to use sampled instruments, and to try and get tunes that sounded like they had more than three voices.
DW: I used my Yamaha CX5 and Roland Jupiter 6, and then machine code and assemblers – but no MIDI – on the C64. I coded everything, although I did share and swap players with Rob Hubbard for a couple of different formats.
MG: I had an all assembly language, no fancy editors, hard-work approach to putting in tune data. This allowed me to custom-modify program code for each tune, but slowed development considerably. Complex tunes could take a month to complete.
JH: For a lot of the *Wizball* music, Martin got Chris to play lead guitar and me to play bass, and then transposed our music on to the C64.
MG: I also used a Seiko synthesiser that was lying around the office, but it wasn't closely connected, technologically – it was just a keyboard I could rehearse on. My code was my own, and I believe I invented the fast arpeggiation technique for mimicking chords, first released in *Kong Strikes Back* in 1984.
GM: I started off using DATA statements, playing notes on my synth, and converting them into numbers from the *C64 Programmer's Reference Guide*! Hundreds of lines of numbers, all hand-coded in BASIC! Later, I got a version of Hall & Oates' *Maniac* that played on interrupts. I was so amazed at music playing in the background while I typed BASIC routines that I found out which program created it and got a copy. That was Master Composer, which I used for everything after that.
MW: I just started entering data and creating the music in situ, so I could hear right away how the final result was going to sound. I've always been disappointed when composing on one platform and rearranging the music on another with its own set of limitations. With only one C64, I couldn't play games while working on the music, but I'd sometimes record it to cassette and play that alongside to make sure it fitted well. Also, with the tiny amount of RAM I was allocated, every byte counted, so I often used polyrhythms – two loops of slightly different lengths that played against each other, resulting in long sections of evolving music before they repeated, but using very few bytes.
NB: I'd meet with Fred Milgrom, who'd brief me regarding what he was after. I'd then hide in my bedroom with a four-track cassette recorder and lots



The SID Crowd



» There are many great C64 remixes, but Reyn Ouwehand's live *Wizball* is mind-blowing. Watch via **www.youtube.com/user/ReynOuwehand** or download the mix at **remix.kwed.org**.

of keyboards and guitars. A couple of days later, I'd play him my ideas and we'd choose which to port to the C64. I'd transpose my four polyphonic tracks into three mono ones in the music language I'd written and implemented for the C64.

FG: I'd find the backbone of a tune on the keyboard, but most arranging was done on the C64, tweaking note and effects data. I used my own drivers and got interesting original effects by using pitch envelopes, as in *Nodes Of Yesod*. When I rewrote my driver, I made great use of ring modulation, as shown in *Mutants*.

RO: I'd studied piano, so I mostly composed on the piano and then put the notes in the computer. But I'm a bad programmer, so I had to wait for others to create players and routines for me, which was a hassle. I think it was easier for Hubbard and Galway to make C64 music, because they were very good programmers. Sometimes, I got to play the games. I custom made music for *Last Ninja 3*, and when Cyberdyne made a game, we stayed in this house and worked together, trying to make the music in sync. But mostly you'd get a fax detailing what was needed: the number of levels, and maybe what kind of atmosphere there should be.

CH: When I got the C64, I played games for a year and programmed a little BASIC. But I really wanted to become a games designer, and so I started assembly programming and made myself a player. When making tunes, I'd usually play around with a bass line, play with cool sounds, make a beat or something, and develop a melody over it. I think my music is more melody-driven than the background – the background's kind of interchangeable. Regarding the sound itself, an important thing with SID is pulse-width modulation, which makes one voice sound very fat, like when you detune a few normal synth voices and play them together. Almost everyone used that to enhance their sounds, and I had that figured out very early. When Galway did his arpeggios, I was already thinking about altering the frequency very fast to get a chord impression. When I heard his Ocean Loader, I coded that stuff in and it made a huge difference.

BD: I did it all in my head. I used to sit down with the text editor and type notes out. If things got very complicated, I'd maybe grab an instrument and see what something sounded like, but generally it was from the head to the page. Tony Crowther wrote a nice driver for me to type in things like 'C2, 10, D2, 13', and we adapted it to add structural stuff – loops, phrases – and define different sounds. I worked with that and other drivers at Gremlin, before I wrote my own, which then made it easier to port code to different platforms.



> "I imagined orchestral pieces or rock arrangements, but rarely tried to emulate instruments – the SID chip had a sound all of its own" *Fred Gray*



» [C64] Top SID composers matched great music with quality sound effects, such as the metallic noises and blasting sounds in Martin Walker's *Hunter's Moon*.

What are your thoughts regarding samples within SID tunes?

RH: Sampling used too much CPU to be practical, but it was a new effect. It was limited, but it did add something to get away from the 'generic' SID sound.

CH: Samples were a discovery I had in my early days at Rainbow Arts. I was researching new ways of enhancing SID sounds and discovered Digidrums. The main program was BASIC and there were assembly routines for the playback of the drums. I found how the drums were triggered and played with the program and realised you could activate SID voices behind the drums. That gave me the idea to combine a SID tune with sampled drums. With a friend, I hacked together a sampler on the C64 user port, sampled my own digi drums, had my own playback routine and combined that with my player. We had this cool stuff laying around for a few months, waiting for a game to put it in, and I imagined the reviewers would go bananas when they heard it. And then Galway's *Arkanoid* came out just before we released our stuff! His technique was based on the same principle as ours, only his drums were more synthesised.

RO: I was never into the digi thing, because I thought it sounded crap. If you want to do the real thing, do it



real. If you want real drums, guitars and basses, record real instruments. For me, the fun thing about SID was that it sounded like a SID – it had its own distinct sound. On the Amiga, you could use samples, but they didn't sound like the real thing, so that's when I quit computer music, got a proper sampler and focused on real music production.

BD: Another problem with samples was the space they took up, not leaving much room for a game. It was technically impressive what people managed to do, but not necessarily musically impressive. It was more about sounds than notes, which was never my bag.

MG: When sample playback was discovered, the musicality went away to a degree, because sample fidelity was low, but it was an unstoppable technological development and couldn't be resisted.

What were the biggest constraints when working on SID music?

BD: Three voices! What could you do in three voices? I wanted an orchestra! [laughs] There was the fun aspect, the challenge – you'd use wobbly chords with really fast arpeggios, and work around the limitations, but it was hard writing good harmonies. And then you'd drop one voice if you wanted sound effects. Deciding which was going to be the least important voice… They're all important! You don't need your explosions – just listen to the music!

GM: I quite like limitation. With current PC recording studios and unlimited sounds, I never get started. You had three voices and you just got on with it.

RO: Limitations give the best results. Nowadays, everything's possible and everything sounds the same. The SID's limitations gave it its own sound and also originality.

MW: The lack of memory was a problem: you were lucky to get a couple of kilobytes for your player code and music data. With few simultaneous channels, I ended up combining several instruments into single musical lines to add depth, like a sampled drum loop today. I'd follow a kick drum with a bass note, then a snare drum hit, another bass note, and so on, while another channel played the melody and a third was dedicated to multiplexed chords. But occasionally memory constraints were so severe that I had to strip features from my player, such as vibrato, to claw back the bytes to squeeze in another tune!

MG: No stereo panning… The filter could only be clearly applied to one voice… I found the ADSR programming tricky too. I adapted compositions to meet the needs of the chip, which meant they don't translate perfectly on other setups without the same limitations. I sometimes imagined a larger tune was in there, but only three notes at any one time could get out.

JD: For me, the biggest constraint at Ocean was the time you had to do something. We were churning out games, and I'd work on platform conversions of tunes. But one of the fun aspects of making music for 8-bit games was pushing the hardware. If we wanted to do something different, we had to work out how to do it.

How did you approach music for arcade conversions?

RH: I always tried to write music to maximise the target hardware. And so if I had to convert some other music I tried to adapt it to suit the C64.

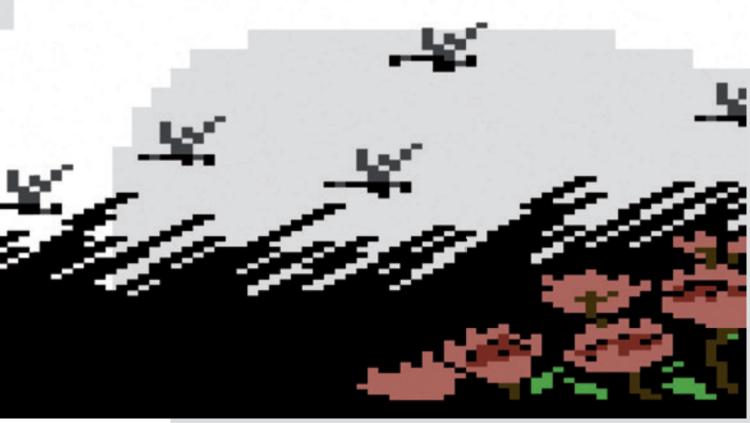
DW: I hated doing arcade conversions. You never got the musical scores – you just had to listen to every single note, again and again. Painful!

JD: Amazingly, we did occasionally get scores for some conversions, although we'd mostly transcribe from tape.

MW: It was a nightmare! Sometimes I got an inch-thick pile of music manuscript paper with scores from Japanese companies, but mostly you were lucky to get a poorly recorded cassette of each tune, made by placing the in-built microphone nearby while someone played the arcade game. Inevitably, they forgot they were recording the music, so you had to fathom out the notes while people chatted, groaned and chortled over the top!

FG: I thought converting arcade tunes was fun – they were a challenge. I once remember hearing a Joplin tune and discovered it was in F-major. I went to the library and found a Joplin anthology, and the first tune in F-major was the music I was after. I quickly converted the dots to numbers and had my music – easiest money I ever made! And there was always some of your own style in the conversions, which was part of their charm.

When it comes to C64 music, what was your proudest moment?





» [C64] *Delta*'s mix-e-load mini mixing desk for Rob Hubbard tunelets. So good, you'd stop loading the game just to mess about with it.



NUMBER CRUNCHING

Bob Yannes designed and completed his work on the initial version of the SID chip in **1981**

Advanced for its time, the SID chip provides **3** independent oscillators with **4** available waveforms each, **1** multi-mode filter, **3** ADSR volume controls and **3** ring modulators

The SID went through **8** known revisions during its life, some of which dramatically changed its output. For example, samples are significantly quieter on the **8580** revision

Zzap!64 gave Rob Hubbard's audio for Monty On The Run **99%**, calling it "Aurally am-m-m-mazing, technically perfect"

The SID had the US patent **4,677,890**, although this expired in 2004

At the time of writing, the High Voltage SID Collection contains nearly **37,000** SIDs

RH: The full orchestral arrangement that I did of *International Karate* was a lifetime ambition. It's a pity it wasn't recorded.
DW: Hearing my music in a game, for the first time, at computer shows.
MW: The first time I heard my music incorporated into someone else's game, along with all the sound effects, and realising how much it enhanced the whole gaming experience.
NB: That moment when you first play a just-completed game, stand back, and feel you've contributed to the full experience. I was proud of songs I created for games that good friends had written, and that I'd contributed to something they were proud of too.
FG: The fact that fans still love what I created back then – the wonderful mixes, rearrangements and live performances 25 years on. It could have easily been forgotten – you guys are the best, listeners and musicians alike!
RO: For me, the whole journey was great – especially, as a teenager, being invited to London for a business trip to make music for cool games!
BD: The number of emails I get from people who say they became a musician because of me. It's amazing to feel you've influenced so many people and turned them on to music. It was a great period, before game music became background 'film' music you don't notice is there. In the Eighties, game music was important – it was something games were scored on. People really appreciated it.

Are you still involved in music and did composing SID music inform your subsequent work?

CH: My basic compositional approach is similar. I've learned more and can do more sophisticated compositions, but you still hear my music and think: 'That's a Huelsbeck composition!'
BD: Writing hundreds of tunes was good composition practice – the C64 taught me about writing music and developing tunes, and the workmanship/craftsmanship aspect. SID music was also good training in utilising minimal resources, helpful for when I started writing for video and theatre. I'm now good at taking a bunch of actors who have never played anything before and getting them to create their own music.
JH: I'm working a lot with music right now. Along with SID'80s, Ben Daglish and I are launching **sensiblesoundware.com** in December 2009, featuring 30 albums of material from games people and collaborators.
MW: Many people haven't realised the Martin Walker who writes for *Sound On Sound* and *Audio Technology* magazines is the same one who created those C64 games and music! I'm also working on my fifth album of ambient music for Yew Tree Magic, and recently took up sound design again. With that, I've ironically turned full circle, again trying to squeeze the last drop of creativity out of a particular sound engine, just as I used to years ago with the SID.
JD: I'm still involved in music and the games industry. I've been releasing



CONTEMPORARY SID



Chris Abbott of C64audio.com provides insight into the SID's role in contemporary music, from the C64 remix scene through to SID samples in commercial chart-toppers

■ What's your background regarding C64 audio?
I started as a wannabe composer, took the initiative with the CD everyone was waiting for, and accidentally moved into publishing and C64 live events.

■ What are your thoughts on the longevity of SID tunes?
There's a niche of creative individuals deeply affected by C64 music. It combined with our lives to become a unique soundtrack. It's good this link to the past isn't lost and that artists use the C64 scene for artistic growth.

■ Why did you create the original *Back In Time* CD?
Everyone had wanted a CD like that for ages. There were technical and budgetary limitations, but getting Rob Hubbard to cover his own stuff was mind-blowing at the time. It remains the bestselling album I've done, and for many people I think it kind of sated them forever.

■ What are your thoughts on the remixes available today?
It's a glut. The days when someone could release something stunningly game-changing are over. People buy less C64 music than they used to, because you can gorge yourself online. But it's good it's there, and the scene's main players work together, so it's a stable environment.

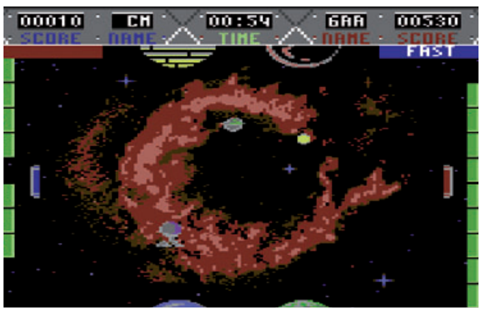
■ There's a dark side to C64 remixing – recording artists using SID samples without permission, such as Zombie Nation. What's your thinking on this?
Actually, Zombie Nation was later granted permission to use *Lazy Jones* in *Kernkraft 400*, but he went way beyond that permission. In the way he acted, it's like renting out your house and finding the tenant later claims to own it, changes the locks, and threatens you with legal action if you try to get another tenant. Then, when threatened, he offers to hire you a room back.

■ What about Timbaland sampling a SID for Nelly Furtado's *Do It*?
That fiasco – sampling Glenn Rune Gallefoss's SID cover of *Acidjazzed Evening* by Tempest – is more typical. It's not surprising to see how a record company and rich producer can behave, but it is disappointing. There's a trial in Miami in 2010 where it will all come out, and hopefully by then someone will have examined Timbaland's master project file. The chances of him having recreated *Acidjazzed Evening* independently with other equipment – making it so similar to the original that it sounds sampled – are zero. But lawyers have to claim ridiculous things and pretend to believe them, and judges often know or care even less about important technical issues. To sum up, when I hear about it, I think 'Not again', rather than 'Hey, a pile of money to be made suing people'. Court action is expensive, uncertain, lengthy and stressful. I'd rather people asked permission and negotiated fairly in advance.

■ What are your thoughts for the future of SID in a modern context?
If it breaks out of its niche, it will be by SIDs being cannibalised into modern hit songs. The possibilities are wide, though these days every man and his dog wants to do *Lazy Jones*. Lazy bastards, more like.









» [C64] Paul Norman's *Forbidden Forest* is one of the earliest videogames with a contextual soundtrack changing as events unfold.

"I sometimes imagined a larger tune was in there, but only three notes at any one time could get out" *Martin Galway*





house music for ten years, and my work has appeared on labels like Hed Kandi and TV shows *Grey's Anatomy* and *CSI: New York*.

NB: I've had bands for years and still occasionally play. The SID years were the first time I'd been paid for being a composer and arranger, and made me a better musician than I'd otherwise have been. I hated the limitations, but the C64 made me work harder, to distil the necessary essence of a song down to the smallest number of constituent parts.

What are your thoughts on the longevity of C64 music?

DW: It's nice people still take an interest, but it is a long time ago!

NB: I find it a bit hard to believe. My life's moved on so far that it's like it happened to another person. I got a call from a fan in Denmark a few years back, and it's one of the most surreal experiences of my life: 'Commodore 64 still rocks in Denmark!'

BD: It's great. When I wrote the tunes, I imagined orchestras and rock bands, and now remixes are being done like that. It's such a gas playing stuff I wrote 25 years ago with SID'80s and making it sound good. Sometimes, when I look back with my 25 years of musical sophistication [laughs], I sometimes think 'Oh my god', but they were good tunes with good melodies. People could sing them and people enjoy a good song they can sing. If you can pull that off on stage, it's great.

GM: I'm amazed that people are still interested. I abandoned the C64 around 1987 and don't entirely understand the C64 scene now – things have moved on. I'm not complaining, though. It's nice to be remembered.

MW: I'm touched people not only remember, but still take the trouble to email me with their thanks for the enjoyment my music has given them over the years. I'm particularly chuffed with the remixes I've heard.

MG: I'm amazed that they're still getting referred to. Most gamers of the era are my age, and regard this thing as a way to remember their childhoods. But there are younger 'retro enthusiasts' who like the sound of early gaming chips! I'm not sure what it all means. Maybe there's an innocence that was lost when more powerful systems came out.

JH: It's nice that SIDs are remembered, but a little sad they're regurgitated. I wish people would focus on creating their own amazing new thing and just listen to old stuff for inspiration. But, overall, it is flattering people even care.

JD: I love the fact that people are still interested enough to remix my old work. If you'd told me 20 years ago that people would be doing this, I wouldn't have believed you.

RO: In the end, it's nostalgia. We all grew up, but with the internet we can stay in our childhoods a little longer. For me, personally, I see SID remixes as an exercise. I respect the original SID and imagine how it would sound today if the composer were in the studio. It's nice when Galway or Daglish tells me my remix is pretty much what they had in mind when they composed their SID.

CH: Until recently I never thought about it. I focus on my career to get to the next step and live off my work. But we all laid the groundwork for videogame music and sound, and being part of a pioneer phase is very cool. That it's still honoured by the fans is a testament to what we did back then.

Special thankyou to: Stein Eikesdal (a.k.a. Stone Oakvalley): www.6581-8580.com, Warren Pilkington (zawtowers.org.uk), Manus Buchart for their help with images.

THE MAKING OF...

ToeJam & Earl

There are aliens and then there are ToeJam and Earl, the hippest cruisers of the galaxy who like nothing better than to rap while cavorting with Earthlings. Join Kim Wild as Greg Johnson demonstrates how to strut some funky moves





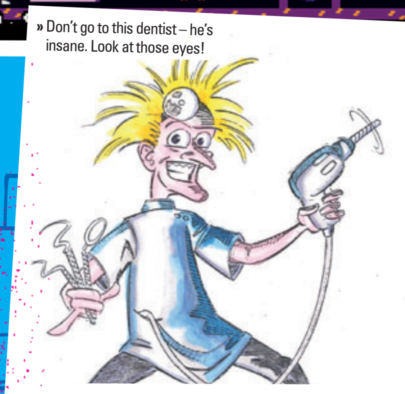




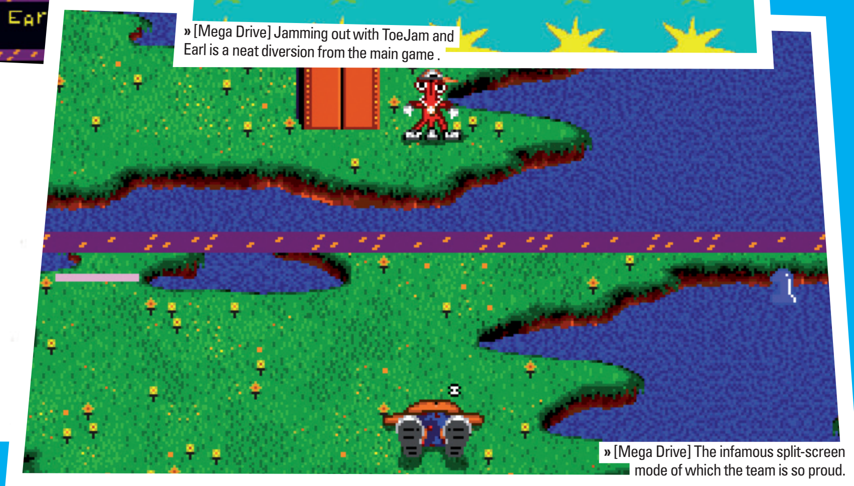
» [Mega Drive] The fanbase has just discovered **Retro Gamer**'s secret hideout.



» [Mega Drive] Jamming out with ToeJam and Earl is a neat diversion from the main game.



» Don't go to this dentist – he's insane. Look at those eyes!



» [Mega Drive] The infamous split-screen mode of which the team is so proud.



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS
- **» PLATFORM:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE
- **» RELEASED:** 1991
- **» GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+

We've seen some crazy aliens in our time. Mechanical beings, green-headed men, blobs of goo and even flesh-eating terrifying beasts, which all fall under the alien category, but none quite match the eccentricity of ToeJam and Earl, the red and orange duo with their love of rap and fast food and a laid-back approach to life. The epitome of cool, these aliens know how to dance, enjoy life and rap with the best of them, even if their piloting skills clearly need some improvement. Yet their distinctive names came about purely accidentally.

"I don't think I've mentioned this before, but my old game development partner Mark had a bit of a hearing problem, and when we were first making the game I told him that the names of the characters were FlowJam and Whirl, which seemed like good hip-hop dance names," remembers Greg Johnson. "Mark heard me wrong and coded them as ToeJam and Earl. I only noticed it when we were showing the game to Sega, and they liked the names so we decided to keep them." When it comes down to their bizarre appearance, it really is the stuff that dreams are made of. "When I was little, my favourite stuffy was this little red giraffe named Puffy Muggins," recalls Greg. "Puffy was missing a leg and his mouth had come off. When I thought of the ToeJam character I was having a dream about Puffy Muggins. He was being chased by this giant orange marshmallow creature that wanted to eat him and everything else. It was horrible; I woke up shouting Puffy's name. That's where they both came from."

Greg Johnson and Mark Voorsanger were the duo behind the *ToeJam & Earl* series, with Greg being responsible for the art, design and voices and Mark programming every inch of code. The two had formed their own company in 1989 called Johnson Voorsanger Productions, which was later renamed ToeJam & Earl Productions once the characters became more popular. It was a relationship that proved fruitful, with the duo frequently bouncing ideas off each other. As a result, the two wanted to create a game that they could play together during development.

"I always played Big Earl, and Mark always played ToeJam – he's a little shorter than I am and he wore this crazy medallion. We would high-five when we did something good, or say stuff like, 'Yo, ToeJam,' when we came back together again. Then Mark said, 'Hey, why don't we just put that into the game?' I said, 'No way! I was just thinking the same thing!' I'm still trying to figure out if I was the one being psychic or if it was Mark."

> "It took four police to drag me out of the intersection where I was communicating with planet Funkotron"

The game itself saw ToeJam and Earl crash land on Earth, scattering ship parts across the globe. In order to return home to Planet Funkotron, the alien duo need to locate all ten parts to reassemble their ship. With a gameplay style heavily inspired by *Rogue* – "Actually it was a rip-off. Don't tell anyone." – either character could be controlled across the levels, which are littered with presents to help you on your way. The content of the presents is a mystery but varies from tomatoes for weapons to rocket skates for super speed and even Icarus wings.

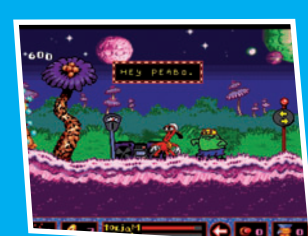
When it came to deciding what was included as a power-up, Greg came up with an ingenious method of selection.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TOEJAM & EARL IN PANIC ON FUNKOTRON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

ORLY'S DRAW-A-STORY
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1999

TOEJAM & EARL III: MISSION TO EARTH
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2002

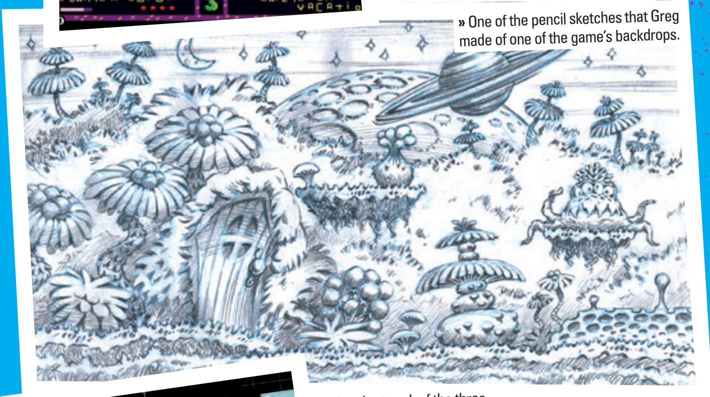


THE MAKING OF…

TOEJAM AND EARL







» One of the pencil sketches that Greg made of one of the game's backdrops.





» Painted artwork of the three main characters in *ToeJam & Earl III*: ToeJam, Earl and female protagonist Latisha.



"The only thing I didn't like about the Genesis was that it would break easily when you threw it"

"I came up with about 250 ideas for presents, but I could only fit about 30 of them into the game. So I wrote all of my ideas on Post-its and put them on the floor sticky-side up. Then I put my cat down in the room, and slammed the door. I took the first 25 Post-its that stuck to her feet. I use that method quite a lot, actually. It works pretty good, but sometimes it's hard to get her back because she goes under the sofa."

Of course, there are plenty of enemies out to stop you, like crazed shoppers, Cupid, the insane dentist, a phantom ice cream truck and our particular favourite, the Wahini, otherwise known as the hula girls who would force any nearby characters to dance. Leave ToeJam or Earl to their own devices and they will jam out. All music featured in the game was penned by John Baker, who would listen to recordings of Greg Johnson singing into a tape recorder and then re-create the songs in the computer.

With two characters at your disposal, you don't have to embark on the quest alone, which is where the technical marvel of the split-screen two-player mode comes in. Claimed by Sega to be an impossible feat, it was nevertheless implemented by Mark without any technical hiccups. "The Genesis was a great little machine. Everyone at the time said that you couldn't do the split-screen trick, but Mark pulled it off – even though it was his first time programming for the Genesis. The only thing I didn't like so much about the Genesis was that it would break easily when you threw it. Mark got annoyed when I would 'fix' his code every time he went to the bathroom. I got pretty good at ducking out of the way when I'd see the Genesis flying at me. We went through probably eight or nine machines."

While the random map generator received a lot of praise for keeping the game fresh, this was a freak occurrence. "We had spent a lot of time making the maps perfect, and then, when I was demonstrating a Big Earl dance move for Mark, I spilled some soda on his keyboard," confesses Greg. "I don't know exactly how it happened, but it caused a bug that made the maps random. It was really cool. The only bad thing was that sometimes the random generator made the maps into weird shapes. For some reason, when we ran the map generator on Fridays, the maps would come up in the shape of Moses. It was freaky."

Development went from its scheduled year into its second, for which Greg has an interesting explanation: "That's because at one point in the project I thought I'd try not sleeping for about a week. It turns out that that's not such a good idea. I can't remember it so well myself, but Mark tells me that it took four policemen to drag me out of the busy intersection where I was standing, communicating with the aliens of Funkotron. Fortunately I was still able to work from the mental ward."

Despite its delay, when *ToeJam & Earl* was released in 1991 it became something of a sleeper hit, growing in popularity as time progressed. As the game was entirely unique in comparison to the rest of Sega's output, the company

Ready, Aim, Tomatoes!

Not content with strutting their stuff on Planet Earth, ToeJam and Earl took time out to feature in a lightgun mini-game created for Sega's new invention: the Menacer. "When Sega released their Menacer gun they asked us if we could whip together a *TJ&E* game in a hurry. We said sure, and put that together in just a month or so using mostly art from game one. It was lots of fun. Mark and me had shooting competitions every day. I still say I would have won if he didn't stand so close to the screen."



» Another sketch of the game's background visual style featuring the lead characters.

WAITING FOR A STAR TO FALL

Before *ToeJam & Earl* came to be, Greg Johnson's first project was working on a game called *Starflight* for EA on the PC, later ported across to the Mega Drive. As space simulations go, it was an epic quest with a huge world crammed with solar systems comprised of multiple planets that each had a detailed history, and it was all contained on just two floppy disks. Initially starting off as an explorer with limited resources, finding artefacts and ruins makes it possible to travel further afield, encountering other species that have the potential to help or harm. 'What's this got to do with *ToeJam & Earl*?' we hear you cry. It seems that Greg desired to meet some real aliens yet felt it would be quicker to build some of his own. With the birth of *Starflight*, "ToeJam and Earl were the aliens that followed."





was unsure how to market it, which meant that initial sales were quite slow. However, rave reviews raised its profile and word of mouth began to spread, eventually translating into around 250,000 units worldwide – not too shabby for an unknown franchise, and its popularity didn't stop there. "*TJ&E* was on the top ten for rentals for about ten years after its release, and a lot of people played it that way," explains Greg. "We never get any money for rentals, though. Sega was never that into the game for some reason. I think it was a little too weird for them."

With such success under their belt, the two began work on a sequel in the same style as the original, with new surfaces like ice and snow, buildings to enter and more presents to collect. Until, that is, Sega intervened. "Sega never really got the first game so much," recalls Greg sadly. "Their marketing department was like, 'Hmmm, this *ToeJam* game is too weird. Let's just focus on this fast side-scrolling game with the angry blue hedgehog from Japan.' We saw that and said, 'Okay, we're going to do plan B and give you guys a side-scrolling game to sell,' so we bailed on the regular sequel and started *Panic On Funkotron*. Looking back, I think we confused the fans. I know I was confused."

For quite a while all was quiet from our intrepid aliens as they plotted their next conquest. Plans for an N64 release were shelved after a publishing deal fell through, and the Sega Saturn wasn't viewed as popular enough for the third game. So development began on a version for the Sega Dreamcast, which sadly got canned once the console hit financial disaster. *ToeJam & Earl*'s new home would become Microsoft's new flagship console, the Xbox, which had the financial backing to fund the new adventure. Named *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth* – changed from the more interesting subtitle of '*All Funked Up*' for marketing reasons – the game went on to receive a mixed reception among the press and its fans, many liking the characters' trademark style and humour but not really gelling with the gameplay. Its conflicting choice of style was once again down to publisher pressure.

"Well that's pretty much Sega's fault, or more to the point, Visual Concepts. They're the guys who were paying us millions of dollars for the salaries of the people making the game. They said that we needed to change the game to be more like *Donkey Kong*, and they kept wanting us to make it harder. We wanted to make a straight-up remake of *TJ&E*, which is what our fans really wanted. Oh well, you've gotta do what the people with the chequebook say or it's game over," laments Greg. "We did our best to still make it like game one, but it ended up with a lot of extra junk in the game and it was easier to get stuck."

Mission To Earth also introduced Latisha, created so that female gamers would have a character that they could play with rather than being stuck with two guys. "I added her because *TJ&E* is a co-operative game for everybody," says Greg. "I wanted to give the female players a girl character that they could play. I suppose for purists it doesn't seem right – after all, it is *ToeJam & Earl* – but hey, I don't get why people whine about that."

Before Greg embarked on his flight back to Planet Funkotron, we had to ask if there was anything new he had to share with **Retro Gamer** readers. "Yes! If you like the music in *ToeJam & Earl*, go to YouTube and check out *Choo-Choo Soul* – I wrote the music for that too. Also, there is a new movie studio interested in maybe making a feature film based on the characters. If that happens then it's game on, baby. I'd love to make more *ToeJam & Earl* games." Jammin'!

CRASH



A true Crash Smash

Celebrating **25 years** of Crash Magazine

Newsfield's Crash was unlike any other gaming magazine, and as a result it's built up a tremendous following over the last 25 years. Darran Jones spoke to Oliver Frey, Roger Kean and Matthew Uffindell and discovered how a Ludlow-based David took on the London Goliaths

RG: So, guys, tell us a little bit about life before *Crash*…

Roger Kean: I was a film editor. I worked for the BBC, Thames Television, Granada and I'd also been doing graphics, because before I went to London Film School I'd been to the college of art. I got bored with painting, however, and thought films were much more exciting. In fact I met Oliver at the London Film School. We moved to Ludlow in 1980. I was still doing one week on one week off in London for a magazine company, but Oliver's brother Franco came up with this notion that Spectrum games, which you couldn't buy in the shops at that time, would become a big business and that we should start a mail order business. We started Crash: Micro Games Action in 1983 and began advertising in the likes of *Computer & Video Games*, *Your Sinclair* and *Computer Trade Weekly*. In turned into a decent business; nothing spectacular, but it kept us in mortgage payments. Anyway, a lot of kids from Ludlow school were reading these magazines and suddenly realised that somebody was selling these games in their sleepy little town and they suddenly began queuing at the door. Simultaneously we received a call from Wells Gardner & Darton. They had seen one of our funny little A4 printed catalogues and had sent it to WHSmith, who had said: 'Well, if there was a magazine like that we'd probably buy it.' That was where the idea for *Crash* started. It was supposed to come out in Christmas 1983, but there was a lot of trouble getting printers, prices and distribution set up, so the first issue was eventually released in January 1984.



» Oliver Frey

RG: So why just focus on the Spectrum and not machines like the C64?

RK: Well, the C64 wasn't particularly big then and the Spectrum seemed more accessible.

Oliver Frey: My brother felt that the Spectrum seemed to offer the most games at the time and that just fixating on one type of computer was better than focusing on more.

RK: The Spectrum seemed to be the one to go for and Sinclair had sold 2 million machines by then. We wanted to concentrate on one thing and do it well. It was also the machine that nearly all the Ludlow school kids had, which meant we immediately had this big pool of reviewers who were the target markets. That's what made *Crash* so unique in the first place. As it had three reviews for most games, but also that the average age of the reviewers was 14.

RG: So you mentioned that there were delays to the first issue. How long did you work on it in total?

RK: We started the issue in November and were very naive to think it would be out in December. We didn't really know the magazine trade very well, but yeah, we started in earnest in early November. Matthew Uffindell and myself really sat down and began putting the first reviews together with around eight or nine of the local school kids. They were given a tape and told to go away and come back the next day with an appraisal of what they thought of it.

RG: So was the management side something you handled yourself?

RK: Newsfield Ltd came to be at the end of 1983 and was myself, Oliver and his brother Franco and Matthew Uffindell and that was it.

OF: We three were the directors and Matthew was…

RK: He was a schoolboy, all right. A college boy.

OF: And the name Newsfield was an off-the-peg name. You could buy companies from certain places and there were ready-made names.

RK: This one was actually called Newsfield Ltd and we thought: 'This seems appropriate. Why change it?'

RG: So where did the name come from?

OF: It was an evening conversation over a meal with the three of us and we were trying to think of a name. I can't remember who it was – I think it was you, Roger – but you came up with the name *Crash*, which of course was a bad name for computers and somehow it sort of stuck. In the games context it sounds good.

RK: Yes, and it led to the fact that the next magazine would have been called *Bang* and the third *Wallop* [both laugh] but a certain Chris Anderson intervened on *Bang* and said: 'No way!'

RG: So why use youngsters to review these games as opposed to proper reviewers?

RK: It was literally a reaction against the likes of *C&VG*. Their reviews always seemed so serious for what they were dealing with. It just seemed stuffy, so we thought

we'd react against that and get the actual target market and see what they thought. Certainly in the first few years we really didn't interfere with what they thought, although we would interfere with their English. Some of them were very good. The likes of Robin Candy and Ben Stone were natural writers. Others, of course, could barely string two words together, but they had a good idea of what the game was.



» Roger Kean

RG: So because they were the target audiences for the games, you felt they had a better grasp of them.

RK: Absolutely. Also in time readers would learn to appreciate one person's review over another. The format carried over to *Zzap!*, but *Zzap!* was slightly different because they were employees as opposed to standard reviewers. But with *Crash* we always used the local pool as they came through. It also helped that employment law was far more lax than it is today. They were all properly on the books but if they were under 16 they didn't have to pay tax or anything like that, but everything was always handled correctly from a tax point of view. The great thing was that anyone could just come up to the door of *Crash* Towers and say: 'I want to be a reviewer,' and we could just go: 'Well, here's a game. Take it away and we'll see if you're any good.'

OF: A lot got turned away.

RK: And a lot got bored as well.

RG: The first issue apparently went on to sell around 50,000. Is that correct?

RK: Well that was estimated because Wells Gardner & Darton, the distributors, took the first issue and the second issue and went bankrupt, which was a disaster because it meant that we weren't going to get paid. We've only got estimates put together by COMAG, who had picked us up because we'd done so well and that was their estimate, which they thought was pretty astonishing.

RG: Is it true you got a letter from *C&VG* saying something like, 'Well done, lads'?

RK: I don't recall anything like that from *C&VG*, but we did get something similar from Dennis Publishing, who were launching *Your Spectrum*. In fact, they were just a bit behind us, but at the same time they regarded themselves as a very professional magazine. *Sinclair User*, on the other hand, referred to us as 'rural pirates' [laughs], which a few issues later they had good reason to reiterate.

RG: Which leads quite nicely into our next question. Did you think that the 'Unclear User' article would cause you so much trouble?

RK: [laughs] It depends. If Franco were here he'd be saying: 'I told them not to run it.' [more laughing] Graham Kidd came up with the concept, and as he was the chief at the time I ran with it because most of our kids were getting very angry at *Sinclair User* for one reason or another. Rightly or wrongly we ran with it. I remember saying to Franco, 'It's not really going to cause any trouble,' partly because we'd been having very friendly conversations with Bill who was the editor of *Sinclair User* at the time, with a view to poaching him. In fact he was virtually on board when this issue came out. He really had no alternative but to turn us down after that. It was a bit horrifying when we got an injunction thrown against us and we did lose a fair amount of money on that issue. It cost us £60,000 in apologies.

Frey on Frey



CRASH No. 25

Mikie

Imagine's *Mikie*, about a school tearaway collecting hearts for his girlfriend, happened to coincide with Valentine's Day. A sweet effect was tempered by a stark white background and the action pose of Mikie.

RG: Tell us about *Crash* during its heyday.

RK: At *Crash* Towers there were three floors – an art floor, editorial floor and production floor – and people were up and down them all the time. I'm sure that Markie [Mark Kendrick] will confirm that it had a very communal feel. We were really buoyed up by the magazine's success and when the figures came back – 106,000 something – there was just stunned silence from everyone. We leapt from something like 80,000 to 106,000 in a three-month period.

OF: We rose rapidly after the 'Unclear User' article.

RK: Yes, we even had support from various software houses. They were all pretty aghast that EMAP had taken action against Newsfield and I think we even received support via advertising revenue. Another aspect that gets overlooked about Newsfield was just how isolated we were. We were typing up our copy, marking it up, sorting out the font size and everything else, sending it to London, to typesetters, getting the galleys back with any spelling errors that we'd done and they'd done and it was costing us a lot of money. Early in 1984 we moved to using Apricot computers for text input and using a local printer and we were able to bring our price down to about

» "Chairman Of The Board"



» A fine piece of Frey artwork, for which sadly only a large plate transparency exists now.



Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 5

Death Star Trench

Inspired by the first *Star Wars* movie, this symbolised *Crash* magazine (white ship) being at the centre of the games action generated by ZX Spectrum software creators, their cassettes being the building blocks of the trench.



a third of the original cost. We began to expand very rapidly and were able to use graphics film planning to shoot the base pages on a process camera and put it all together, although we couldn't do the cover then. We started developing production people who would just work on the print side and we moved very quickly into full colour as well. Not scanning, but all the tints and coloured lettering and everything like that.

RG: You must have put some insane hours in initially.

RK: Yes, certainly the editorial people kind of worked all hours. *Crash* Towers was usually alight at midnight and into the early dawn. Production staff on the whole managed reasonable working hour days, although this would change as the mags went to print and they'd be working all hours as well.



» Matthew Uffindell

RG: Let's talk a little about *Crash*'s covers. Why did you decide to go with art covers?

OF: The thing is *Crash* was supposed to be all about the games and at the time most computer magazines had photos of equipment and it was all rather boring. And we thought: 'Games are just as exciting as the movies so let's treat the games with exciting pictures that you might see at the cinema.' The computers are only there to play the games on. That's my attitude.

RG: Where did the inspiration for most of the early covers come from, because they weren't always based on games…

OF: No, they weren't. To be fair, I have to give Roger credit as the editor, as he'd often come up to me and say: 'Can we do this?'

RK: The cover with *Sherlock Holmes* by Melbourne House was arguably the first one that was based on a game.

OF: The notion there was to have Sherlock Holmes with his big magnifying glass and reflected in it was the name of the game. It was just to make it look a little different. It's like the first cover of *Crash* with the alien playing *Space Invaders*; it's just a little joke.

RG: When you look at the covers now, many of them contain evocative, powerful imagery. Were you ever told that you couldn't put something on the cover?

OF: Well, the *Barbarian* cover certainly comes to mind. It had a barbarian gripping someone here [gesticulates] with a bloody great big sword and WHSmith put it on the top shelf because it was too bloody and violent.

RG: Do you think that sort of notoriety helped to sell the magazine?

OF: Well, my opinion is that boy readers like that sort of thing and it's the adults who don't want to look at covers that are thrilling and exciting and maybe slightly over the top.

RG: How long did the average cover take to put together?

RK: It varied, didn't it? *Crash* 1 took a long time.

OF: After that, though, it was always usually around three days max, because I had to keep up and do illustrations for the inside as well, so you couldn't be too precious. You had to work pretty damn quickly.

RG: So what's your favourite cover?

OF: Well actually my favourite is the original. I just thought it was the simplest and the cleverest. I just think it's funny to have an alien playing *Space Invaders* and it came out looking very powerful.

RK: We also wanted him to stare straight out at the audience, and this was something we wanted to do with all our covers. We wanted people to pick them up and think: 'They're staring at me.'

RG: What about yourself, Roger?

RK: I'd probably side with Oliver and say number 1. There were others that were really powerful. Another of my favourites was when the 128k model came out and we called the cover 'All-Singing, All-Dancing' and it had a curved keyboard with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers on it. I always thought that was a good one.

RG: So what about your least favourite?

OF: There was a mud wrestling one featuring Hannah Smith that I had to do that I really didn't like. In fact I was forced to do it because Graeme [Kidd] felt she deserved to be on the cover. I mean it was well painted and everything, but I just thought it was awful. Luckily she took it with her. If something's too cute I just don't like it.

Frey on Frey



CRASH No. 20

Red Moon

The notion of summing up a game's feel with a simple, in-your-face, image: red moon, big monster, puny humans – this was a very popular cover.

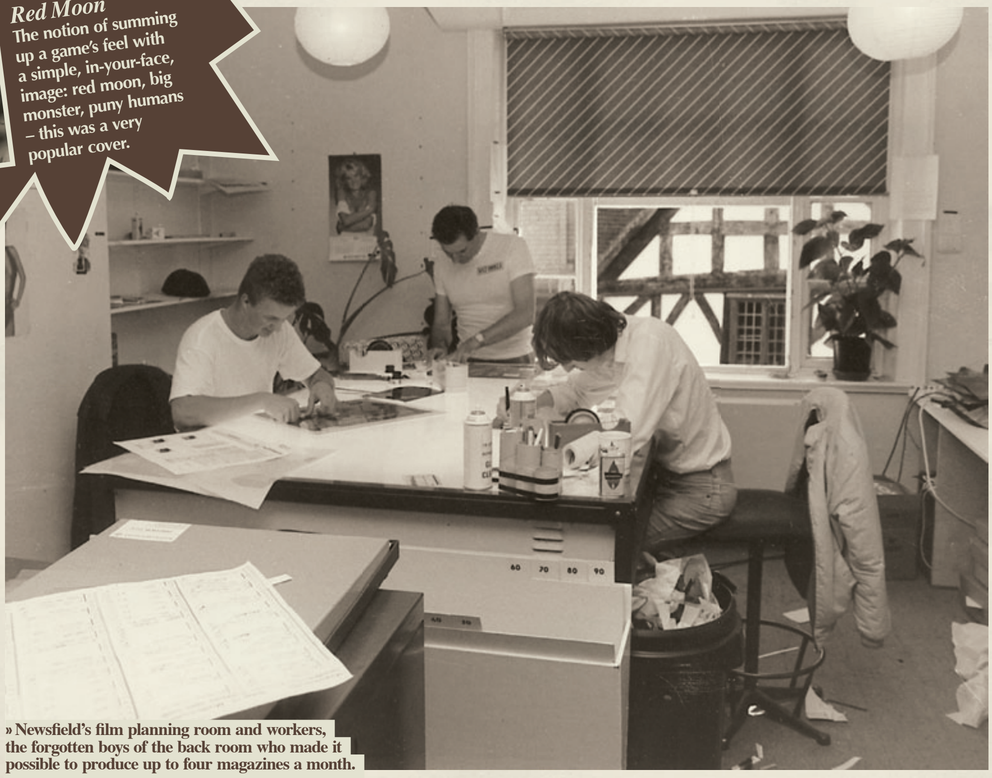
RG: How much pressure did you get from publishers for their games to receive good scores?

RK: I certainly remember Franco being summoned up to see US Gold after trashing something that they saw as being precious. He said: 'Well, there's nothing I can do about that', and they just turned around and said, 'Well, we can pull advertising', to which he said, 'Well, yes you can'. They didn't in the end. We avoided a lot of the pressure, simply because it became the standard for software houses to actually come to Ludlow and show the games to the actual market.

RG: How did your excellent interview with Ultimate come about?

RK: I was astounded to get a phone call from Chris Stamper saying about how much he loved the magazine and I pushed my luck and decided to ask for an interview and the answer was no. Around about the third or fourth issue, however, they rang up and said that we could go and see them. I went with Robin Candy and spent all day at Twycross and it was amazing, because they were certainly one of the most sophisticated developers at the time and we were able to see all the new games that were coming up. I was allowed to take a couple of colour photographs of one or two of the games, but it was all quite sensitive, but in the end we had an excellent relationship with them. It was very hard not to, though, as every game they brought out just went straight to the top.

[It's at this moment that we're joined by Matthew Uffindell, who has travelled up to Ludlow at short notice to take part in the interview.]



» Newsfield's film planning room and workers, the forgotten boys of the back room who made it possible to produce up to four magazines a month.



Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 32

Dan Dare

Pilot Of The Future offered me a rare chance to draw one of my childhood heroes the way he appeared in the Fifties in *Eagle*, rather than the revamped Dare I'd had to draw in the early Eighties for IPC. It was great fun!



» Rich Eddy and Robin Candy showing off the new Thalamus Games T-shirts before the launch of the software house. (1986)

Oli Online

If you're a fan of Oliver's powerful and evocative art, you may want to visit his brand new website. The Art of Oliver Frey features a selection of some of his greatest work from the past two decades and is an essential visit for anyone who's been impressed with his stunning imagery. This is also the first time that people have been able to buy original prints, so if there's a particular *Crash*, *Zzap!* or *Amtix* cover that you fell in love with back in the day, there's never been a better time to own the original and hang it on your wall for all to admire.

New art is being added all the time, and Oliver is also making it easy to see what has already been sold, so if you're looking for a specific piece of art and you can't find it, odds are it will be appearing online very, very soon. Visit www.oliverfreyart.com for more information.



RG: So, Matthew, how did you become involved with *Crash*?

Matthew Uffindell: It happened by accident, really. I heard that they were selling games on their doorstep and I thought: 'Well, I'll have a little wander down and see what it's all about.' I knocked on the door, we had a chat and I bought a game. I went back the following week and bought another game, and we had another chat and Roger said: 'Do you want to review some games?' So I did that, and then it was like, 'So, do you want a job?' and it just went on from there and we ended up reviewing thousands upon thousands of games.

RG: So what were the prices like for reviewing games?

MU: We did it really for the love of it. We got to play these games.

RK: Once we'd got into King's Street by issue 4 we started to put things on an official footing and I think we paid a fiver per review.

RG: That's actually pretty bloody good. We'd have had to wash about 20 cars to earn that sort of money back in the day.

RK: I definitely think they got reasonably paid for the work. But you're right: the first three or four issues were all about the love of being able to actually just play the game. That was mainly because everything was still so… amateurish? I guess that's the word you could use, but once we realised the magazine was going places we had to start getting serious in terms of management handling.

RG: What was it like working on *Crash* in the early issues?

MU: It was brilliant, actually, because instead of working it was like loving chocolates and working at a chocolate factory type of scenario. It was more of a family sort of environment and you'd be like: 'What's coming in today, Roger?' And you'd go and have a look at it and it was always exciting, especially when it was the Ultimate titles. We just played games to death really. It wasn't really work and it certainly wasn't a 9 till 5 job; it was just something I used to really enjoy doing. It was also cool the fact that you got to play games so long before your friends did.

RG: Did you have the relevant training before you took your position full time?

MU: Lots of it was passion and knowledge. I remember when *Space Invaders* came into the arcades, the first time I got to play *Pong*, so I had a good background of what was required to make things tick. Everyone was educated to a certain level. In fact I remember walking around and simply dictating to Roger.

RK: I'd be using a typewriter initially, typing away and Matthew would be walking around going, 'Hmmm, right…' [everyone laughs]

MU: It was very much like that and I'd just be pacing backwards and forwards spewing out all this stuff.

RG: What was it like grabbing screenshots? It was quite a convoluted process…

MU: Basically you had the camera and it was all about finding something that would whet the appetite for the game. You couldn't have a load of pictures on the page, so you just had to choose an image that would be of interest to the reader.

RK: Usually the photographs were taken in a second session in the sense that you'd normally play the game first and hopefully get to the end, although the timescale meant this wasn't always possible.

RG: So how long did you spend reviewing games on average?

MU: Well, you would always try to complete a game within the timescale. In fact I'd often take a game home at night and play through the night if need be, just because I loved to. My mum and dad would always moan. I remember one time when we were getting the Christmas special out you'd go in at like 7:00 in the morning and you'd then work through till four [in the morning] and then come in at 7:00 again the next day. You'd end up with a three-hour snooze, just because the magazines were stacked up over

Old Faces



Nick Roberts:

Then: *Staff writer*
Now: *Business Development Manager*

How did you get your job on *Crash*?
I was a reader picking up his monthly copy for 95p when I discovered that the Playing Tips writer, Hannah Smith, was leaving. I sent in a letter to Roger Kean, on Alphacom 32 thermal paper printed out from my Spectrum, asking if I could take over. That piece of paper set me off on a career that has lasted 22 years as Roger took me on as an after-school reviewer.

What was it like on the magazine?
It was like being a member of an exclusive club, and very rock and roll. There was a great bunch of people around at the time – Robin Candy, Mike Dunn, Ben Stone, Julian Rignall… – and many of them are still big in publishing and videogames today. We used to have a great time at the PCW Show, too, where we were made to feel like pop stars as readers queued up for autographs! That's weird and doesn't happen much these days.

Aren't you *Crash*'s longest-running writer?
Yes, that's right. I started on issue 47 and wrote for the magazine until issue 98 when the company went bust. 51 issues, man and boy! I worked my way up to assistant editor by the end.



Mark Kendrick:

Then: *Art editor*
Now: *Creative director*

What was it like working at *Crash*?
I learned very quickly that this was unlike any working environment that I'd known. It was a wild time, when computer gaming was the new rock and roll and the people who worked on them were like superstars. Just reading a copy of *Crash* you, even now, get a sense of 'belonging' to a unique group of people. As crazy as this may seem, I'm really not overstating this, as I believe this injected the magazines with magic, which made them what they were.

What did you learn from working with Oli?
Perhaps the most important thing I learnt from Oli was to have confidence in your own style. His work is so distinctive, and against a backdrop of so many other styles going on at the time, his work has continued to be enduring. Overall, though, I learned the visual aspects of magazines, and in particular how cover structure and the balance between type and art is essential.

Why do you think *Crash* is still held with such high esteem?
It was the right product, at the right time, with the right tone. *Crash* came along to fuel the excitement of videogames and gave a sense of community to a new, massively expanding hobby, just when home computing became accessible to all. I look back now and I really think it would be tough for another 'independent' videogames magazine to top 100,000 sales every month ever again. They will forever be the giants of single-format games titles.

The full interviews with Mark and Nick can be found at http://blog.retrogamer.net



» 2 King Street, Ludlow: *Crash* and *Zzap!* Towers. Newsfield occupied the three floors above Victoria Wine from May 1985 until July 1989, when everything moved a mile away to bigger premises in Case Mill.

Christmas and you'd do two or three in a very short space of time.

RK: Famously, Gary Liddon actually lived in King's Street, sleeping under one of the art tables for about two months until we finally decided that we couldn't stand it any longer and kicked him out.

RG: You've been talking about the Christmas specials. Why did you decide to start doing Christmas-themed covers?

OF: It just made perfect sense because it was Christmas. We always tried to accumulate as many pounds worth of prizes as possible as well to make it more enticing. Also, I used to find the covers really challenging, as you always had to find interesting ways of combining Santa Claus with aliens.

RK: I was actually a fan of the Amstrad Christmas cover as it had some really realistic depictions of the editorial team on it.

RG: The editorial team would always have a strong presence within the magazine and often appeared on the cover. Do you think this helped build the relationship with your readers?

MU: Absolutely, and I think that it's identifying that we're just normal people, and if you like shoot-'em-ups and you knew Julian [Rignall] liked it, you knew that it was going to be a good game.

RK: It worked particularly well on *Zzap!*, because by then there were fixed reviewers and not these pools of roaming reporters. I think being able to identify with a reviewer's tastes and preferences really helped a lot and again made the likes of *Crash* and *Zzap!* stand apart from their competitors.

RG: So, with three people reviewing the same game, was there much of a collaboration process on the reviews?

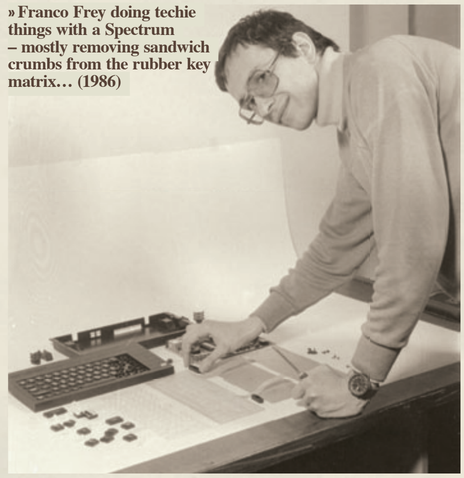
MU: In *Crash* in particular I used to play the game to death, Roger would play it and watch me play the game, and another reviewer would play the game to death as well. They were all fairly independent.

RK: I remember it could sometimes get quite heated with everyone disagreeing with each other on certain games and then I'd have to step in, not to get them to agree, but to get them to agree to disagree with each other. I think there were definitely times when someone would go off in a huff and say, 'Well, you can write what you like, then', but they always came back and ended up writing what they were going to say in the first place.

RG: Now one of the most famous members of the editorial team on *Crash* wasn't even real. How did Lloyd Mangram come about?

MU: I could have sworn I saw him the other day in town. [everyone starts laughing]

RK: Well, there is a Lloyd's Pharmacy [in the town], as someone pointed out to us online when they were in Ludlow. They thought he'd gone into the pharmacy business.



» Franco Frey doing techie things with a Spectrum – mostly removing sandwich crumbs from the rubber key matrix… (1986)

RG: Was it just a way of making the editorial team look bigger?

RK: Of course. [more laughing] We were such a tiny team that we needed to create credible other people.

MU: It was also a useful way of airing some of the views and opinions that we weren't quite sure about.

RK: Lloyd's main job was the letters page. We'd always intended to have a reasonable number of pages for letters and it required a character to run those pages as if it was the love of his life, just as it was for the reviewers to review their games. And also to give snappy responses to sassy 14-year-olds who thought they knew it all.

RG: How many letters did you get on average a month?

RK: By issue 5 we were getting around 300 to 500 letters a month. By the time we were hitting a 106,000 ABC it

Frey on Frey



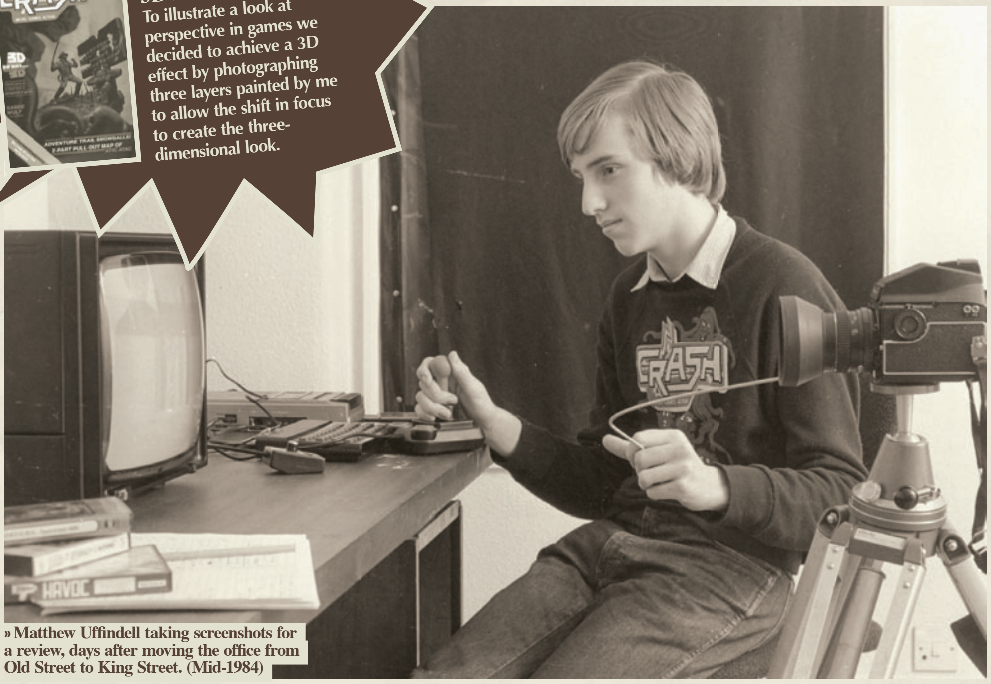
CRASH No. 41
Barbarian
I'll admit that I got rather carried away on the blood and impending horror that features on this *Barbarian* cover. In fact, WHSmith complained and gave us stern warnings over future re-offending…

Frey on Frey

CRASH No. 6

3D Feature

To illustrate a look at perspective in games we decided to achieve a 3D effect by photographing three layers painted by me to allow the shift in focus to create the three-dimensional look.



» Matthew Uffindell taking screenshots for a review, days after moving the office from Old Street to King Street. (Mid-1984)



» The target market getting their first look at *Crash* #2, the *Kong* cover. (1984)

was impossible to respond. We were far and away Ludlow Post Office's biggest customer.

RG: Is it true that stores were asking for your proofs so they could see early review scores and stock their shelves accordingly? That must have felt good.

RK: Yes that did happen for a couple of years or more. Once buyers had cottoned on to *Crash* it happened a lot. We would send them the early proofs of particular reviews and they made buying and stocking decisions on those reviews. Of course it felt good. It's a little easy to be smug about it, but we don't know of any other magazines that were doing it at the time or getting that sort of attention.

RG: Where did the idea for The Terminal Man originate?

OF: Because the magazine was aimed at teenage boys and was about videogames I somehow felt that it needed a comic strip. Roger agreed, but he did feel that I was taking on quite a lot, as it was effectively four extra pages every month. I can't remember quite how but I managed to get hold of Kelvin Gosnell who was the editor of *2000 AD* at one point and he came up with the idea for The Terminal Man. He wrote the first story all by himself.

RG: So it went away, came back and then…

OF: It stopped.

RG: So what happened?

OF: We decided – well, I decided – that he ought to come back. I started writing the stories and what happened was I came under so much time pressure that I wasn't keeping up and unfortunately it sort of stopped midstream.

RK: It was a hard decision.

OF: But on the other hand, I didn't want to have a nervous breakdown.

RK: By then we had five magazines and other stuff on the table of which Oliver was art director, and it was quite clear it had to stop. In fact, it took him more time doing four pages of The Terminal Man every month than working on an actual cover.

RG: So how do you think videogame magazines compare now?

RK: I would have to be honest and say that I rarely ever look at them, so I'm not really the best judge. What I do see, however, is that they're far more sophisticated and you can do fabulous things today that would have taken us hours back in the day. We used every trick in the book to get as much colour in the magazine as possible and today that's not something that people even consider.

MU: As far as content goes, it's quite similar really. You have your review and then your verdict and maybe an award. Has it changed? I think what's really changed is… How shall I put this? We felt connected with our readers; I'm not so certain if these people feel as connected with their readers. I'll be honest with you: I never buy a magazine for games reviews now. I just type in a game on the internet and get given a list of reviews to read.

RG: *Crash* had a particularly big influence on later games magazines. Is this something you'd agree with?

RK: I'd go further. I'd say that not necessarily the look or the layout, but the attitude of *Crash* informed magazines like Emap's *Empire*, with this notion that you don't have to be serious and detailed. When *Empire* came out I remember thinking that the biggest compliment was seeing '*Empire* Towers' and thinking, 'Where did that come from?' I think the attitude informed Emap a lot, and yes, it certainly went a way to changing how videogame magazines looked and felt.

OF: For me I think what really makes a magazine work, especially for young readers, is to make them feel as much a part of the magazine's world as possible. That's all we ever tried to do with *Crash*.

Crash. The followers speak

Despite the fact that it's now a quarter of a century old, *Crash* and sister mag *Zzap!64* are still held in high esteem by a great many *Retro Gamer* readers. We've already heard first-hand why Oliver, Roger and Matthew felt the magazine was a success, but what about its still-loyal fan base?

■ **Forum ID: the_hawk**
For me it was the beautiful artwork, *Lunar Jetman* and the slightly more trustworthy reviews than *Your Sinclair* and *Sinclair User*. It was NEVER as funny as *Your Sinclair*, though.

■ **Forum ID: SirClive**
It was written by gamers, rather than journalists, so you could trust it. It was basically a commercial fanzine and that gave it a unique feel.

■ **Forum ID: Beakerzoid**
The layout, design, and the writing all combined to give a trustworthy source of info and reviews on all things Speccy related. Yes, *Your Sinclair* was funnier, but *Crash* was the more reliable source. As SirClive so rightly points out, it was written by people who genuinely had a love for the subject they were writing about. It was such as shame when all the mags began their 'free games' each issue, as it inevitably led to *Crash* becoming nothing more than a small bundle of papers with a tape stuck to the front.

■ **Forum ID: psj3809**
I just loved the layout and design. Looking at scans now brings back a ton of great memories. I trusted their reviews – yeah, there was the odd disaster, like *Zoids*. It had tons of playing tips and pokes, and some great maps every month and a lot of exclusives with previews of new games and interviews.

Huge amount of disappointment when I went to WHSmith and it wasn't there for whatever reason. On the flip-side, the Christmas specials really were amazing back then: tons of pages and it kept you reading for ages. As other people have said it was written by fans that had a genuine love for the Speccy. Brilliant magazine until it went to the pamphlet with the tape on the cover.

Perfect covers by Oli Frey, great reviews, great tips/maps, and back in the Eighties you loved seeing all the game adverts!

visit www.youtube/user/retrogamerdaz for more interviews with Oli and Roger

MYRIAD

A MANY-SPLENDOURED THING



- **PUBLISHER:** RABBIT SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** EXPANDED VIC-20 (8K)
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



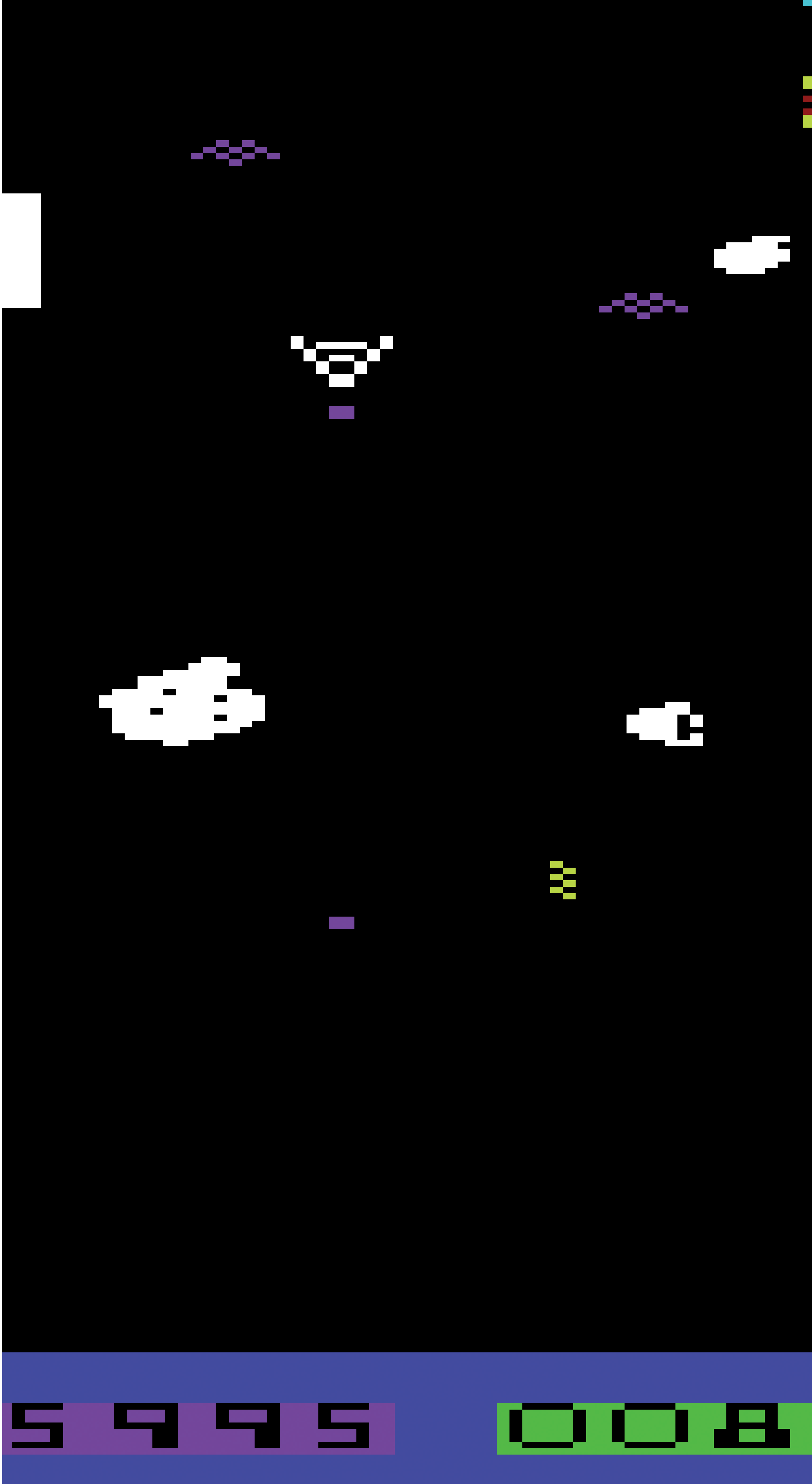
HISTORY

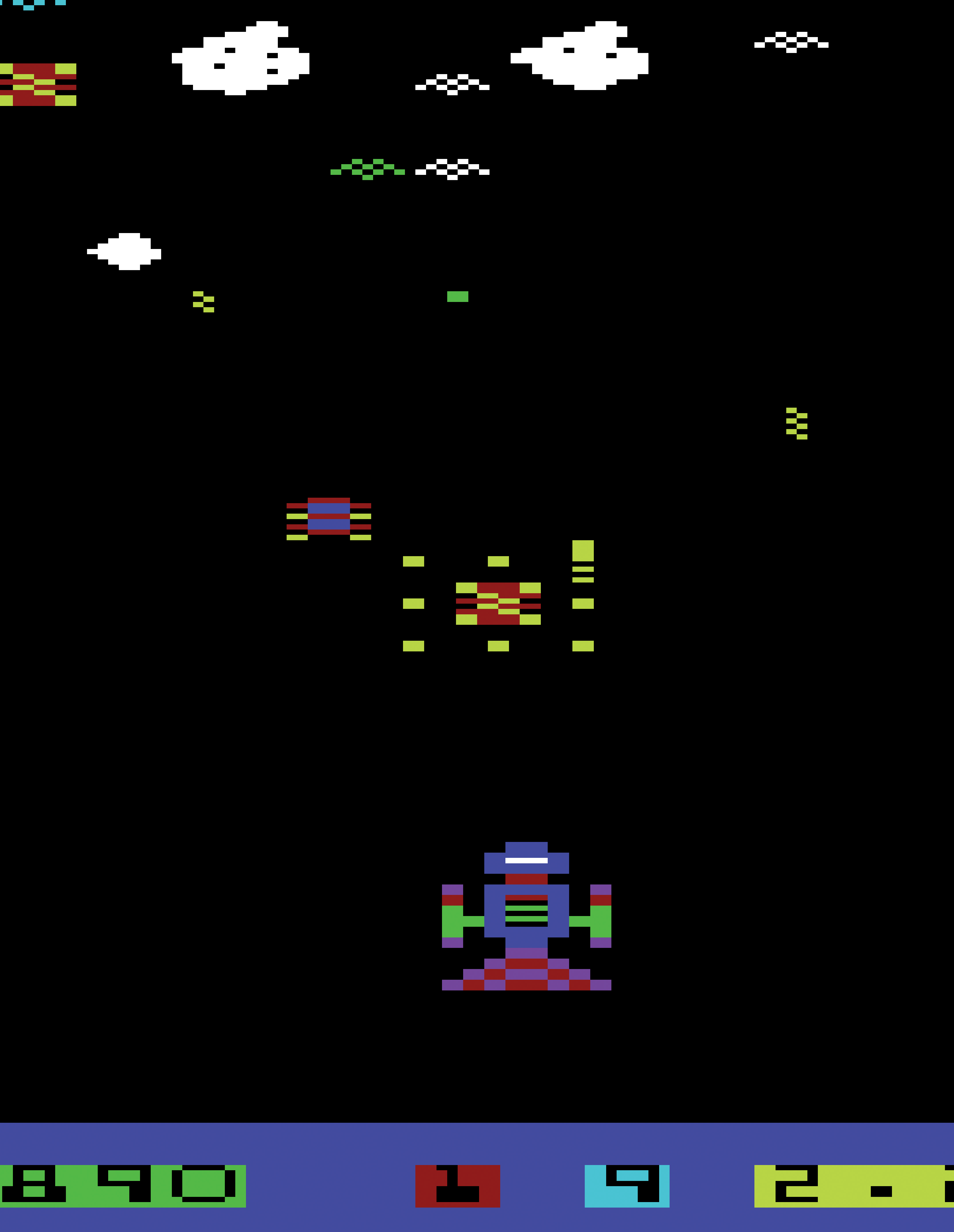
I think I've worked out why the VIC-20 has such a special place in my heart. It isn't just that it was my first love and recalling tentatively fumbling with its keyboard evokes the same intensity of feeling as my first 'proper' kiss at the school Christmas disco – both happened in the same week and it's largely been downhill from there. It was that, like so many teenage crushes, it was but a fleeting affair. The pale, slender innocence of the VIC was soon cast aside for the worldly pleasures of its well-stacked big sister, the C64.

Myriad was one of the highlights of that early awakening. It's an unabashed blaster, which hurls an array of Swoopers, Buzzers and the worryingly named Floaters into the stream of your twin lasers. Chaos ensues. The onslaught was relentless, yet there were lovely moments of calm, as in the few seconds between waves when you desperately try to clear up the debris dropped by attacking pods or when you tap the space bar with your toe and make a destructive push up through the hordes, protected by your powerful shield. Still screenshots don't do it justice. You need to see the blur of bullets and primitive pixels skittering across the screen, preferably of a chunky Eighties telly, to really appreciate how it upped the ante.

Yet it also signalled the beginning of the end of my brief dalliance with the VIC. *Myriad* required an 8K RAM cartridge to run, and now that I'd seen how big could be so much more beautiful, I pestered my parents, did extra paper rounds and soon upgraded to Commodore's beige bread bin.

My relationship with the 64 would be a lasting one and, of course, it delivered more elaborate blasters, but you always remember your first time. So thanks to creator Steve Clark for making Christmas '82 so special… and Natasha for curing me of my tongue-tie.






SONY
PlayStation
RESET
1
2
L
R
SONY
PlayStation
SELECT
START
ANALOG

PlayStation



THE NAME PLAYSTATION HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS WITH VIDEOGAMING, BUT SONY'S ROUTE INTO THE INDUSTRY WAS ANYTHING BUT STRAIGHTFORWARD. JOIN DAMIEN MCFERRAN AS HE CHARTS THE HISTORY OF WHAT IS ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSOLES OF ALL TIME

It's almost impossible to conceive it now, but prior to the 32-bit PlayStation's launch in 1994 there were real doubts in the media over its chances. Over 100 million hardware sales later, such pessimism seems woefully misplaced, but it's easy to forget just how many hurdles Sony had to overcome to make a success of its first piece of videogames hardware – and media scepticism was the least of those problems.

The PlayStation concept actually has its roots way back even before the 16-bit generation had hit the marketplace – 1988, to be precise. Always thinking a few steps ahead of its rivals, Nintendo was actively courting manufacturers to create some kind of expanded storage device for its Super NES console, which was in development and due to hit the market in just over a year. Sony – in conjunction with Dutch electronics giant Philips – was working on a new format called CD-ROM/XA, a new type of compact disc that allowed simultaneous access to audio, visual and computer data, making it thoroughly compatible with the medium of interactive entertainment. Because Sony was already being contracted to produce the SPC-700 sound processor for the SNES, Nintendo decided to enlist the electronics manufacturer's assistance in producing a CD-ROM add-on for its 16-bit console.

For Sony, it was a dream come true. Having been instrumental in the production of the ill-fated MSX computer format, the firm never hid its desire to become a key player in the burgeoning videogame business. Therefore, an alliance with what was unquestionably the biggest and most famous name in the industry would not only help elevate Sony's standing; it would also enable the company to set the wheels in motion for its ultimate plan: to put its consumer electronics experience to good use and produce its own videogame hardware. The industry was growing at an alarming rate thanks largely to Nintendo's hugely successful NES and Game Boy systems, and Sony was keen to obtain a foothold.

The initial agreement between the two firms was that Sony would produce a CD-ROM expansion for the existing SNES hardware and would have licence to produce games for that system. Later, it was supposed, Sony would be permitted to produce its own all-in-one machine – dubbed PlayStation – which would play both SNES carts and CD-ROM games. The format used by the SNES-based version of the PlayStation was called 'Super Disc', and Sony made sure that it held the sole international rights – in other words, it would profit handsomely from every single SNES CD-ROM title that was sold. It was a match made in heaven: Sony would instantly gain a potentially massive installed base of users overnight as the SNES was a dead cert to sell millions of units. SNES users would upgrade to the new CD-ROM add-on when they knew that Nintendo's cutting-edge games would be coming to it, and Sony would make money on each software sale. What's more, once the all-in-one PlayStation was launched, Sony would gain even more in the way of profits and become a key player in the videogame industry. The man behind this audacious scheme was Ken Kutaragi, the engineer also responsible for producing the aforementioned SNES sound chip.

However, behind the scenes Nintendo was predictably far from happy with the proposed arrangement. It was very protective of its licensing structure, which allowed it to extract massive royalties from third-party publishers. Allowing Sony leverage in this sector would only damage Nintendo's profitability; the Kyoto-based veteran reasoned that it should be making the majority of the profit on SNES CD sales, not Sony. The plan – if it came to fruition – would ultimately benefit Sony far more than Nintendo: the former would merely be using the latter as a way of getting a ready-made market share and would eventually become

SPECIFICATIONS BOX

Year released:
1994 (Japan), 1995 (US/Europe)

Original price: ¥39,800 (Japan), $299.99 (US), £299.99 (UK)

Buy it now for: £10+

Associated magazines:
PlayStation Plus, Official PlayStation Magazine, Play

Why the PlayStation was great…
Some would argue that the videogame industry in the mid-Nineties was in dire need of a boot up the backside, and the PlayStation delivered this kick. Technologically groundbreaking and supported by a wide range of third-party developers, the machine is home to countless classic titles. While some of these games have aged badly, most remain just as essential today as they were over a decade ago.

INSTANT EXPERT

- The Sony PlayStation is the first videogames console to sell over 100 million units worldwide
- *Gran Turismo* is the system's bestselling title, with 10.85 million copies sold
- The PlayStation can generate 360,000 flat-shaded polygons per second
- With only 2MB of main RAM, the PlayStation struggled with 2D titles that required lots of animation frames, while its rival the Saturn fared better thanks to the fact that it had twice the amount of memory and could be expanded still further with a separate cartridge
- Approximately 7,900 different games were produced for the PlayStation during its 11-year lifespan
- Cumulatively-speaking, PlayStation software sales stand at an astonishing 962 million units worldwide
- Each Sony Memory Card came with 128KB of storage for save game data. Higher capacity third-party cards were also available
- The console's impressive sound processor can handle 24 channels of audio
- Early versions of the machine were afflicted with skipping FMV and sound, thanks to the poorly designed nature of the CD drive. Later models rectified this issue, but early adopters still shudder at the memory of having to place their beloved consoles upside down in order to get them to work properly
- Early UK adverts for the machine featured SAPS – the Society Against PlayStation – a fictional organisation that was committed to preventing the console from ensnaring the country's youngsters

a determined rival as a result. Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi was famous for being particularly ruthless in his business practices, but what happened next is one of the most infamous double-crosses in the history of the videogame industry.

It was at the 1991 Consumer Electronics Show that Nintendo dropped the bombshell. Sony went to the event full of enthusiasm and on the first day proudly announced the details of its new alliance with Nintendo, as well as news of the Super Disc format and the impending development of the SNES-compatible PlayStation. Sony had less than 24 hours to soak up the palpable level of excitement generated by this press conference before Nintendo confirmed that it was, in fact, working with Philips on the SNES CD-ROM drive. Yamauchi had gone behind Sony's back at the last minute to broker a deal with the Dutch company – a deal that was predictably skewed in Nintendo's favour – leaving Sony publicly humiliated at the very moment it had expected to usher in a new era as a serious contender in the videogaming arena. At the time, Yamauchi and the rest of Nintendo's top brass were suitably pleased with their skulduggery; such swift action had prevented Sony from taking a sizeable bite out of the company's profits. As it happened, the planned Nintendo-Philips alliance resulted in little more than a handful of risible Nintendo licences on the CD-i, and the abject failure of Sega's Mega-CD seemed to lend credence to the viewpoint that expanding existing consoles was a mistake, so while Nintendo had protected its best interests by leaving Sony at the altar in such degrading fashion, it actually gained little else of note – aside from a dogged rival.



» Although SNK's Neo Geo system had used the same concept some years beforehand, Sony's decision to go with removable data storage for save game files was regarded by many as truly groundbreaking.

Sony had, by this point, poured a significant amount of cash into the proposed PlayStation concept. It had even moved as far as the prototype phase, with PC CD-ROM titles such as Trilobyte's *The 7th Guest* being mooted as possible launch games. Despite the tumultuous events of the 1991 CES, a deal was signed between Nintendo and Sony that would allow the latter to make its machine compatible with SNES CD-ROM titles – with the proviso that Nintendo would retain all software royalties. Although it was nothing more than a clever stalling tactic by Nintendo to keep Sony from entering the market on its own, this proposed alliance nevertheless kept the increasingly frustrated Kutaragi and his team busy. However, by 1992 it had become clear that such a union was going nowhere. Sony cut off communication with Nintendo and the company was painfully close to withdrawing from the arena for good.

Only Kutaragi's intense resolve and determination prevented the PlayStation dream from ending in 1992. During a meeting with Sony president Norio Ohga in order to decide the future of the project, Kutaragi made bold claims about the kind of machine he had been developing. He argued that the 16-bit PlayStation, with its reliance on a union with the incumbent – not to mention untrustworthy – Nintendo, was a dead end. The only option was to go it alone and create a brand new piece of hardware capable of shifting 3D graphics at a hitherto unprecedented rate. When Kutaragi's ambitious proposal was greeted with derision from the Sony president, he presented another side to his argument: could Sony's pride allow it to simply walk away when Nintendo had so blatantly abused its trust? By making



» UK gamers were treated to the amusing 'Society Against PlayStation' advertising campaign, complete with its dorky spokesman.



VARIANTS PLAYSTATION'S MANY FACES

SNES PlayStation

■ The fruit of Sony and Nintendo's ill-fated union, this machine would have played SNES carts and SNES CD-ROM software. Although it was never officially released, it formed the basis of the 32-bit machine. Legend has it that Sony still has 200 prototype units secreted within its Japanese headquarters.



Sony PlayStation

■ The groundbreaking original. This piece of hardware kick-started an era of Sony-led market dominance that would last for the best part of a decade. Early units suffered from skipping FMV and CD audio thanks to their entirely plastic CD-ROM mechanism; later versions had metal parts that fixed the issue



Net Yaroze

■ Aimed at bedroom coders, the Net Yaroze came with development tools that allowed users to create their own games, some of which turned up on official demo discs. It also had no regional lockout, so games from any part of the world could be played on it. Naturally, it was far more expensive than the standard PlayStation



PSone

■ Released in 2000, this revised machine was smaller than its predecessor, clocking in at a minuscule 38x193x144mm. An official LCD screen accessory could be attached to make this the first portable PlayStation, albeit without an official battery. It outsold the PS2 in its first year on sale





COMMUNITY THE BEST PLAYSTATION RESOURCES ON THE WEB

The PlayStation Museum
playstationmuseum.com

■ A truly amazing site that is dedicated to preserving the history of Sony's machine. Here you will find reviews and features, as well as lots of data relating to unreleased titles or prototypes. Well worth a visit if you have a few hours to spare.



PlayStation DataCenter
psxdata.snesorama.us

■ A must for collectors, the PlayStation DataCenter has listings for almost every game released on the format. It even has high-quality cover scans to download. A real gold mine of information for dedicated PlayStation fans.



Push Square
www.pushsquare.com

■ While it's not strictly aimed at the PSone, Push Square is nevertheless one of the net's leading Sony sites. It covers retro-related news items as well as the PlayStation's offspring. If you're a Sony fanboy, then you should bookmark this site for sure.



Absolute PlayStation
absolute-playstation.com

■ Another site that covers the entire PlayStation brand, Absolute PlayStation is packed with reviews, guides, blogs and even a chat forum. It's also regularly updated with the latest and greatest Sony games, so if Sony is your passion, this is the place to be.





» [PlayStation] *PaRappa The Rapper* was one of the first music action titles and helped kick-start the recent explosion in rhythm-based gaming.





» [PlayStation] *Final Fantasy VII* was one of the PlayStation's most significant releases, not just in commercial terms but from a critical viewpoint as well. It became the first JRPG to gain truly international acceptance.

the PlayStation project a success, the company would experience the sweet taste of revenge at the expense of its one-time ally.

Kutaragi's speech hit a nerve, and early in 1994 Sony confirmed that it was entering the videogame arena with its own console, and even formed subsidiary Sony Computer Entertainment in order to oversee the new venture. Keen to differentiate this new project from its previous namesake, Sony branded it the 'PlayStation-X' – this gave rise to the abbreviation 'PSX', which is still used even today, even though the 'X' was later dropped when the console was officially launched. Early reports were impressive, with some developers confidently proclaiming that Sony's console would blow away the competition. Despite the company's wide entertainment portfolio – which included music label CBS Records and Hollywood studio Columbia Tri-Star – Sony boldly decided not to focus on the multimedia market, as its rival Philips, with its CD-i and 3DO, had done, to its great cost. Instead, the PlayStation was unashamedly proclaimed as a dedicated gaming machine, with SCE's director Akira Sato confidently stating that: "If it's not real-time, it's not a game" – a thinly veiled criticism of other CD-based consoles and their reliance on FMV titles that featured live actors but little interaction. The sheer power of the new system shocked other players in the industry; Sega of Japan president Hayao Nakayama was reportedly so furious when he read the specs for the PlayStation that he personally visited Sega's hardware division and gave them a stern talking to. His tirade would result in the Saturn, Sega's entrant in the 32-bit console war, getting an additional video processor to boost its graphical muscle, but this would make the system harder to program for – an issue that had severe ramifications in the future.

> **"By making it a success, Sony would experience revenge at the expense of its one-time ally"**

When you take into account Sony's position as one of the world's foremost electronics manufacturers, it's hardly surprisingly that the original PlayStation was a highly desirable piece of kit. Unmistakably a games console but showcasing a hint of mature design, the machine seemed to speak to those gamers who had cut their teeth on the likes of the NES, Mega Drive and SNES and were now ready to progress to an entirely different level of challenge. Everything from the two-pronged joypads to the removable Memory Card storage system seemed to drip sophistication. Sony later revealed the numerous hardware designs that had been considered before the final version was decided upon; this was the work of a company that was taking its entry into the videogames market very seriously indeed. Kutaragi – and the entire project in general – had come under fire from high-level Sony executives who argued that videogames were toys for children, and therefore, one of the PlayStation's key aims was to challenge that view. As a result, the final design for the machine was sleek and serious, mimicking the appearance of a top-end piece of audio-visual equipment rather than a games-playing device.

However, while this posturing caught the attention of gamers, some industry experts were less enthused, citing Sony's poor track record in the industry up to that point. The company's software publishing arm – Sony Imagesoft – had so far failed to generate any titles of note, pushing half-baked movie licences such as *Cliffhanger* and *Last Action Hero* onto store shelves to the complete indifference of the games-buying public. Indeed, software was one area in which Sony was at a distinct disadvantage, as Sega and Nintendo had highly talented internal development teams that traditionally produced the best software for their respective consoles. Sony

Developer Viewpoint

Robert Troughton (programmer, Destruction Derby)

■ "IT WAS LATE in 1994 that Sony – and myself – were launching into the console games business. Straight out of university, I wasn't really sure what to expect. Reflections, a game developer based in the North East, were just beginning work on a new genre of racing game: *Destruction Derby*. The premise was simple: a racing game which you win not by coming first – although that helped – but by smashing your competitors' cars to a pulp. From starting in January '95, we had only nine months to complete the project, with a team consisting of just three programmers and one artist. The PlayStation was technically leagues ahead of the competition, with amazing 3D graphics and CD-ROM technology. I can't remember whether any of us saw daylight for those nine months, but I'm not sure that any of us cared all that much. Sony loved us for how fast we were creating the game – they gave us a release date that would tie in with the PlayStation's US and European launch – the press were all over us and it was clear that the game was going to be a success. *Destruction Derby* went on to sell millions. The PlayStation sold many times more, and I've stayed in the industry ever since, still doing what I was doing back then: hacking away at code and trying to squeeze every last bit of juice out of whatever platform I'm working on – and thankful to Sony for giving me this opportunity."



Station to Station



■ RELEASED LATE IN the machine's lifespan, the PocketStation was a self-contained handheld similar in design to Sega's Dreamcast Visual Memory Unit. Its announcement caused a surprising degree of excitement, and many industry insiders confidently predicted that this miniature console was Sony's attempt to crack Nintendo's stranglehold on the handheld market. Dubbed a "personal digital assistant", it stored save game data just like a typical PlayStation Memory Card but could also play crude games on its 32x32 dot matrix LCD display, although, predictably, the quality of these titles was well below what could be experienced on Nintendo's Game Boy. An infrared connection was also included so users could exchange data without having to connect their PocketStations to their main console. Launched in 1999, it was only supported by a handful of titles and sadly never saw release outside Japan – although a release was obviously on the drawing board at some juncture as several Western games came with PocketStation functionality.

lacked this key feature, although it was at least attempting to rectify the issue by courting highly rated UK code shop Psygnosis, which would go on to publish vital launch titles such as *WipEout* and *Destruction Derby*. Still, there was an overwhelming feeling that although Sony was perceived to be doing everything right, it would ultimately fall at the final hurdle; Sega and Nintendo would continue to fight it out, just as they had done during the previous format war. 'Sony doesn't know games,' the critics cried. Thankfully, the firm managed to secure the assistance of a company that certainly did know something about the industry: Japanese arcade veteran Namco.

Pac-Man creator Namco was undergoing something of a resurgence thanks to the incredible impact made by its 3D coin-op *Ridge Racer*. A texture-mapped tour de force, the game was unquestionably a cutting-edge piece of programming and had given its parent company the ability to leapfrog persistent rival Sega in arcades. When Namco revealed that it was porting its hugely successful racer to the PlayStation, it caused quite a stir. The notion that Sony's new console could replicate an arcade title that cost thousands of pounds created astonishing levels of expectation, and this only increased when the first shots of PSX-based *Ridge Racer* were released to the public. Coded in an incredible six months, the game might not have been arcade-perfect, but it did enough to cement Sony's position as a key player, purely because it made Sega's heavily delayed in-house conversion of its *Daytona USA* coin-op look decidedly second-rate by comparison. Elsewhere, the PlayStation's visual prowess was demonstrated by exquisite third-party titles such as *Jumping Flash* and *Battle Arena Toshinden*, the former being a groundbreaking, if shallow, 3D platformer and the latter a likeable, if uninspired, one-on-one brawler. *Toshinden* couldn't hold a candle to Sega's *Virtua Fighter* port when it came to gameplay, but it was nevertheless a fundamental game in Sony's arsenal because it looked far, far better. From screenshots alone, it was clear that the PlayStation had the edge in terms of raw power.

The Japanese launch took place on 3 December 1994 – a handful of days after Sega had shifted 200,000 Saturn consoles on its first day of sale. Priced at ¥39,800 (around £250 in today's money) the PlayStation sold strongly, although the Japanese public seemed to gravitate towards Sega's console more, possibly because *Virtua Fighter*, despite the slightly unimpressive Saturn conversion, was the country's number one arcade title at the time. Both formats started out fairly evenly, but as the months rolled by Sony was able to deliver on its promises thanks to sterling releases from Namco, Konami and Capcom, while Sega's in-house projects stalled. Ironically, Sony's reliance on third-party developers proved to be in its favour. Because it needed outside assistance, the company had made great efforts to get software support, while it could be argued that Sega was less active in courting developers. Sony had made the PlayStation as accessible as possible, and it was paying dividends.



» DMA's controversial *Grand Theft Auto* started its console life as a PlayStation release and made several appearances on the machine.

The technological gulf didn't do the PlayStation any harm, either; titles such as *WipEout* looked gorgeous, with transparent textures and eye-popping flare effects. Sega's machine lacked both of these embellishments, and, thanks to its complex dual-CPU setup, required the best coders to really get the most out of it. Meanwhile, third-party studios were getting stuck in to PlayStation game production, and a string of classic titles began to emerge. *Tomb Raider* – ironically a Saturn title originally – along with *Tekken 2*, *Soul Blade*, *Ridge Racer Revolution* and *Resident Evil* all contributed to the PlayStation's wide and varied catalogue of titles.

» [PlayStation] *WipEout* came to define the PlayStation's approach to gaming and is a staple of Sony's first-party lineup.



» Norio Ohga was Sony president during the genesis of the PlayStation project. He saw off apathy within the company to ensure that Kutaragi's dream came to fruition.

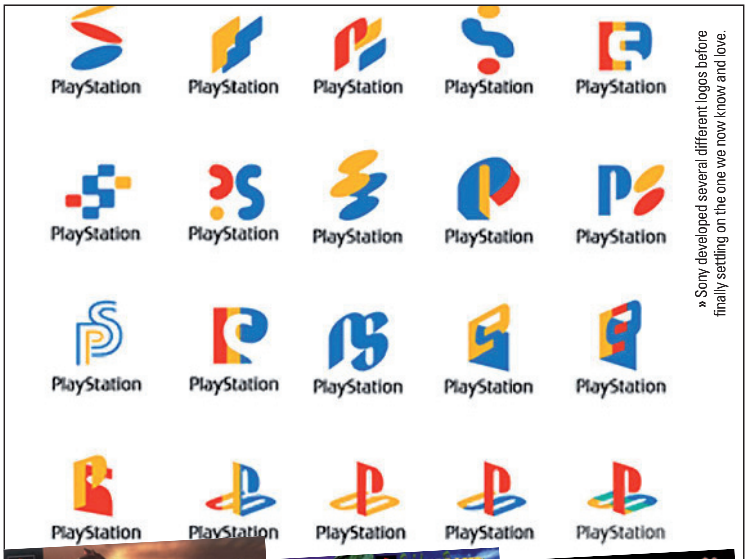




» Fraternising with the enemy: Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto samples *Crash Bandicoot* during the 1996 E3 show.



» Sony developed several different logos before finally settling on the one we now know and love.



» Sony Europe's Phil Harrison was instrumental in attracting quality developers to the machine and would eventually rise to the top of the company.









The Western launches were equally successful, with Sony managing to undercut the retail price of Sega's Saturn in both North America and Europe. In Europe, especially, Sony displayed a masterly grasp of how to market a games machine to a more mature audience. The company knew that those gamers who had grown up with the 8-bit and 16-bit consoles were gradually reaching adulthood and would therefore require more 'grown-up' gaming experiences. While Sega and Nintendo focused on building recognisable mascots to appeal to youngsters, Sony released the PlayStation with a range of software that was unashamedly adult in tone: the aforementioned *WipEout* featured a soundtrack that showcased the talents of real recording artists, such as The Chemical Brothers and Leftfield, while visceral top-down shooter *Loaded* not only featured excessive gore and allusions to transvestism but also enrolled the assistance of grebo-rock outfit Pop Will Eat Itself. One thing was clear: Sony wasn't aiming for the *Mario* and *Sonic* audience with the PlayStation.

Sega's challenge soon began to falter, and so Nintendo became Sony's next opponent. The firm responsible for such classics as *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda* had been making confident noises about its cartridge-based Ultra 64 (later Nintendo 64) console for some time, and although it wouldn't be ready until 1996, Nintendo went to great lengths to encourage gamers to hold off on buying a 32-bit machine. Sadly, the decision to stick with the expensive cartridge format would cost the firm the support of one of its most prized third-party publishers: Squaresoft. Although the highly anticipated *Final Fantasy VII* had been confirmed as an N64 release, Square eventually switched development over to Sony's machine, citing the limited storage and high unit cost of cartridges. *Final Fantasy VII* was going to be the most epic game yet conceived, and it needed as much storage space as possible. Only CD-ROM could offer this, Square argued. Nintendo's loss was, of course, Sony's massive gain; published in 1997, *Final Fantasy VII* was a worldwide smash, selling 10 million copies in the process. This success established the console as the leading platform of its generation and subsequent system exclusives such as Konami's *Metal Gear Solid* and Polyphony Digital's seminal *Gran Turismo* cemented this lofty status even further.

With both Sega and Nintendo subdued, Sony's dominance was assured. So tight was the company's grip on the marketplace that even the launch of Sega's technically superior 128-bit Dreamcast in 1999 was unable to upset the status quo. With millions of units sold and a more powerful successor – the PlayStation 2 – waiting in the wings, 2000 saw Sony release a new iteration of its 32-bit console in the form of the PSone. Smaller, sleeker and sexier, it boasted enhanced functionally that allowed it to link to mobile phones and even supported a fold-down LCD display, giving it a small degree of portability. The revision was a triumph and enabled the ageing machine to remain relevant in a marketplace that was gradually leaving it behind in technological terms.

Sony ceased manufacturing the PlayStation in 2006, giving the console an impressive production lifespan of 11 years. During that time it redefined the world of videogames, granting gamers a taste of 3D visuals and making the oft-derided hobby a cool and relevant pastime. Of course, such activity earned Sony – and, by association, its console – a fair degree of scorn also, but few would have the temerity to debate the PlayStation's incredible influence on modern interactive entertainment. Without it, the gaming landscape today would be near-unrecognisable.

PlayStation

PERFECT TEN



TOMB RAIDER

» **RELEASE:** 1996
» **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS INTERACTIVE
» **CREATOR:** CORE DESIGN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FIGHTING FORCE

01 **Although her star** has waned a little over the past few years, there's no denying that Lara Croft remains one of videogaming's most enduring icons. Her 1996 debut was actually on the Saturn, as developer Core Design had traditionally supported Sega's consoles. However, it was the PlayStation version – released shortly afterwards – that was truly responsible for firing the delectable Miss Croft into the realms of global superstardom. Sequels followed as it firmly became a PlayStation series and arguably improved on the template, but the original game retains a near-legendary status.

GRAN TURISMO 2

» **RELEASE:** 1999
» **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
» **CREATOR:** POLYPHONY DIGITAL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** OMEGA BOOST

02 **The first *Gran Turismo*** was possibly the most technically groundbreaking release of the 32-bit era, and this sequel beefed up the already considerable experience by adding more cars, more tracks and even a rally mode. The title's visuals – already pretty mind-blowing in the original release – pushed the 32-bit hardware to the absolute limit, with Polyphony Digital's unique development software eking out every last drop of power from the PlayStation in its final years. Spanning two discs, *Gran Turismo 2* is arguably the definitive racing title of that era and still plays great today.



02

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DEW PRISM

03 **Released only in** Japan and North America, this strategy RPG arrived around the same time as *Final Fantasy VII*, which caused some confusion when gamers discovered that they actually had very little in common. Developed by the team behind *Tactics Ogre* – Square snapped up studio Quest prior to producing the game – *Final Fantasy Tactics* showcases gorgeous visuals, breathtaking music and a surprisingly mature and complex plot. It was recently released on the PSP in a slightly enhanced form.

METAL GEAR SOLID

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER PRO

04 **Hideo Kojima's magnum** opus set a new high watermark for storytelling in videogames, as well as introducing an entire generation to the wonderful stealth sub-genre. Solid Snake has gone on to become a household name, starring in more technically impressive sequels on the PS2 and PS3 consoles. However, hardcore fans maintain that this instalment remains the best, thanks largely to its tight plotting, memorable characters and judicious use of the host hardware.

RESIDENT EVIL 2

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DINO CRISIS

05 **The first title** established Capcom's reputation as master of the 'survival horror' genre, but it was the second game in the series that truly confirmed the company's god-like status. Offering the ability to play the story with two different characters – one to each of the game's two discs, with differences depending on which you play first – *Resi 2* mixed relentless zombie slaughter with intriguing puzzles and some of the best visuals seen on the PlayStation up to that point. It's unsurprising that series fans hold this entry in the utmost regard.



03



04



05

GAMES

The original PlayStation brought us a massive number of franchises that have become part of the gaming landscape today. Just take a look at the list below…



06



07



08

TEKKEN 3

» **RELEASE:** 1998
» **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SOUL BLADE

06 ***Tekken 2*** **had** proven that Namco was more than capable of taking on Sega's illustrious *Virtua Fighter*, but it was the third game that dazzled the most. Sceptics had feared that it would never appear on the 32-bit console, but Namco's expert coders managed to squeeze in every aspect of the coin-op to create a fitting pugilistic swansong for the ageing PlayStation. While the Tekken Force and Tekken Ball modes were superfluous additions to the domestic port, all of the important features were present and correct.

EINHÄNDER

» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BRAVE FENCER MUSASHI

07 **Famous for being** Square's one and only entry in the shooter genre, *Einhänder* is an incredible achievement. The team involved had no previous experience with this type of game, yet it managed to create a classic that is still talked about in hushed, reverent tones even today. Featuring a unique weapon system based on grabbing the ordnance of fallen enemies, *Einhänder*'s brilliance is made even more remarkable when you consider that Square hasn't ventured to the genre since its release.

FINAL FANTASY VII

» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** SCE
» **CREATOR:** SQUARE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SAGA FRONTIER

08 **Having sold over** 10 million copies worldwide, *Final Fantasy VII* needs no introduction. Cited as the game that sold the Japanese RPG to the Western mainstream, this three-disc epic made the most of the PlayStation's technical capabilities to deliver hours of turn-based entertainment. It remains arguably the most popular entry in Square's evergreen franchise and has recently spawned several spin-off games and other projects, such as *Crisis Core* on the PSP and the *Advent Children* CGI movie.



09

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

» **RELEASE:** 1997
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PROJECT OVERKILL

09 **The PlayStation has** a reputation for being something of a duffer when it comes to 2D titles, and to a certain extent, this is true. The console had only 2MB of RAM compared to the Saturn's 4MB, and this resulted in some lacklustre conversions. However, titles like *Symphony Of The Night* – coded with Sony's hardware in mind – were mind-blowing. Fusing 2D and 3D effects, Konami's designers created one of the most mesmerising titles of the generation. Look out for the limited edition European version, complete with art book and CD.

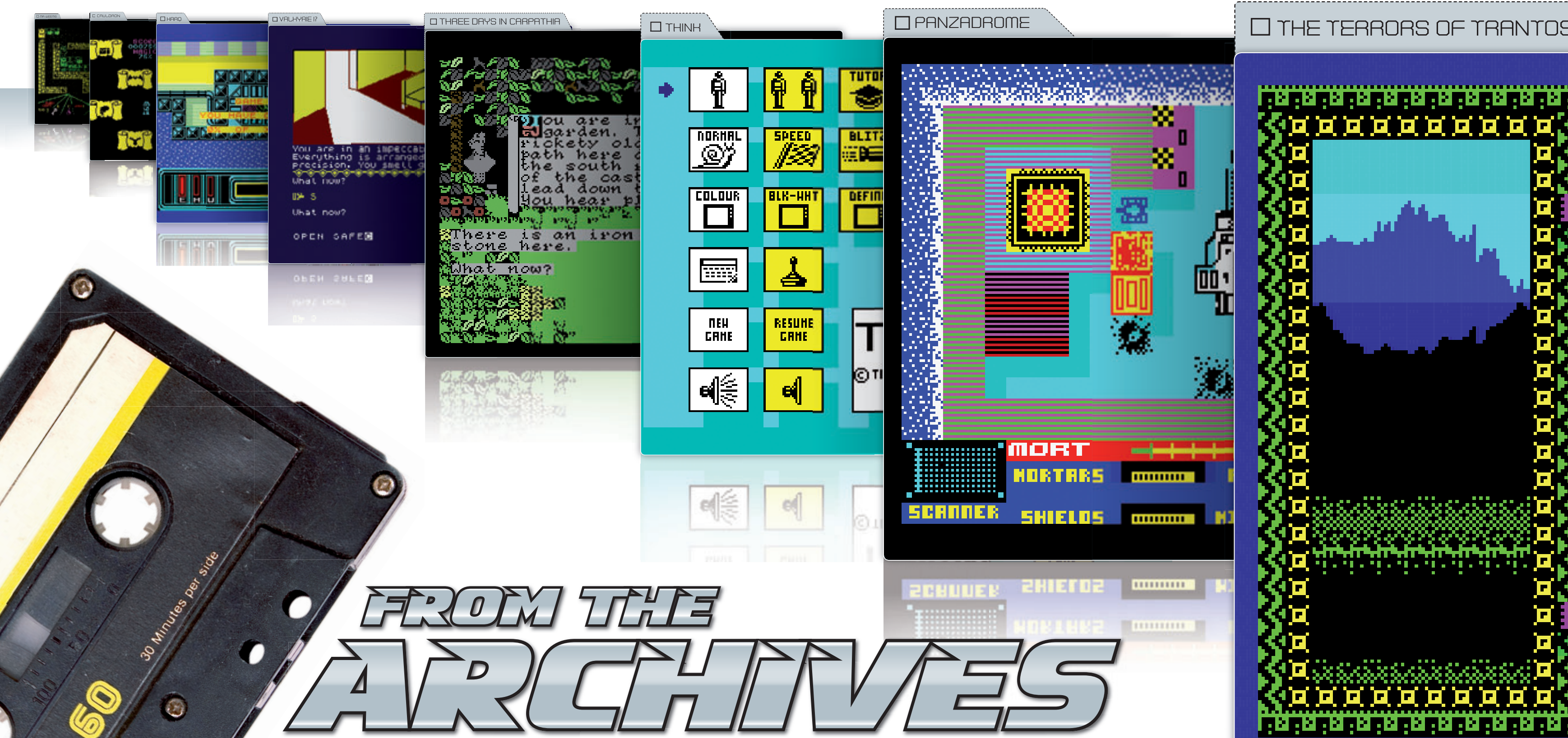
VAGRANT STORY

» **RELEASE:** 2000
» **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE
» **CREATOR:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FRONT MISSION 2

10 **One of the** most ambitious role-playing games of the 32-bit era, *Vagrant Story* is epic in every sense of the word. Produced by the same team responsible for *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the game featured a deep and sometimes disturbing storyline, and lead character Ashley Riot has to rank as one of the most hard-edged protagonists in videogame history. *Vagrant Story* was recently re-released on Sony's PlayStation Network and can be purchased and downloaded for play on both the PlayStation 3 and PSP, and it even lives on through its shared universe with the *Final Fantasy Tactics* series and *Final Fantasy XII*.



10



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

RamJam Corporation

Richard Hewison mixes 8-bit publisher Phipps Associates with a dash of Cinzano Bianco, a pinch of Max Headroom and then liberally sprinkles text adventures and arcade games on top. The result? The RamJam Corporation, obviously!

In the mid-Seventies, Trevor Toms was working as a programmer for a large corporate software house on mainframe operating systems, along with director John Phipps. By the end of that decade, home 'micro' computers were just starting to appear, and John and Trevor left soon afterwards to form a company called Phipps Associates, based in Epsom. Their original aim was to produce system software and applications for the new micros, so how did they become side-tracked into publishing successful 8-bit games like *Greedy Gulch, The Knight's Quest, Colditz* and the orienteering simulator *The Forest*?

"As a small side venture from the day-to-day business, I produced some games and utilities for the Sinclair ZX80 written in BASIC, and John thought it would be a good marketing idea to publish them in a book and send it to key customers as a Christmas gift," recalls Trevor. With 500 copies of the *ZX80 Pocket Book* produced and delivered, John wasn't sure what to do with the surplus, so he approached some shops and was surprised to receive an initial order for 100 copies. This proved to be a pivotal turning point for the new company.

Meanwhile, the ZX80 was quickly superseded by the ZX81, and this gave Trevor the perfect excuse to write a second book of program listings for the new Sinclair computer.

"We went on to sell the books in WHSmith outlets and we licensed them for translation into French, Dutch and German, as well as Americanising them for the US market," says John. "They were also sold in New Zealand and Australia, and at its peak I think we sold 100,000 copies of *The ZX81 Pocket Book* alone."

INSTANT EXPERT

When Trevor Toms left Phipps Associates to form RamJam, one casualty was Tony Barber's platform arcade game *Video Hell*, as Phipps completely turned its back on games publishing.

RamJam's internal adventure creation utility was nicknamed 'The Biro' by programmer Tony Barber, jokingly referring to Gilsoft's commercial adventure creation program called *The Quill*.

Three Days In Carpathia was meant to be the unfinished follow-up – but not sequel – to *Valkyrie 17*, written by George Stone on the Commodore 64, with graphics by Simon Dunstan and Hugh Riley.

RamJam's corporate logo featured a chicken, which appeared differently each time, inspired by the rock band Camel, who similarly used a differently dressed cartoon camel on each album cover.

***Wolf Blast* was** another unfinished RamJam adventure, designed by musician Lu Edmonds, guitarist for Seventies punk band The Damned. The plot involved sending a pack of wolves to the moon!

In 2006, Tony Barber recreated his *Valkyrie 17* adventure for the PC using a program he wrote in Liberty basic, inspired by The Biro and unsurprisingly called The Biro 2.

One listing in particular proved to be very popular in Trevor's new book. "My love of the original adventure game – *Colossal Cave Adventure* – led me to create an adventure authoring program for the ZX81 book, which generated a lot of interest from members of the public and inspired some of them to send us their own games," explains Trevor.

One of the people who got in contact was Mike Farley, who went on to write a number of games for Phipps including *Greedy Gulch*, *The Pharaoh's Tomb*, *Magic Mountain* and *The Knight's Quest*. Trevor took the opportunity to add a graphical capability to those early adventure games.

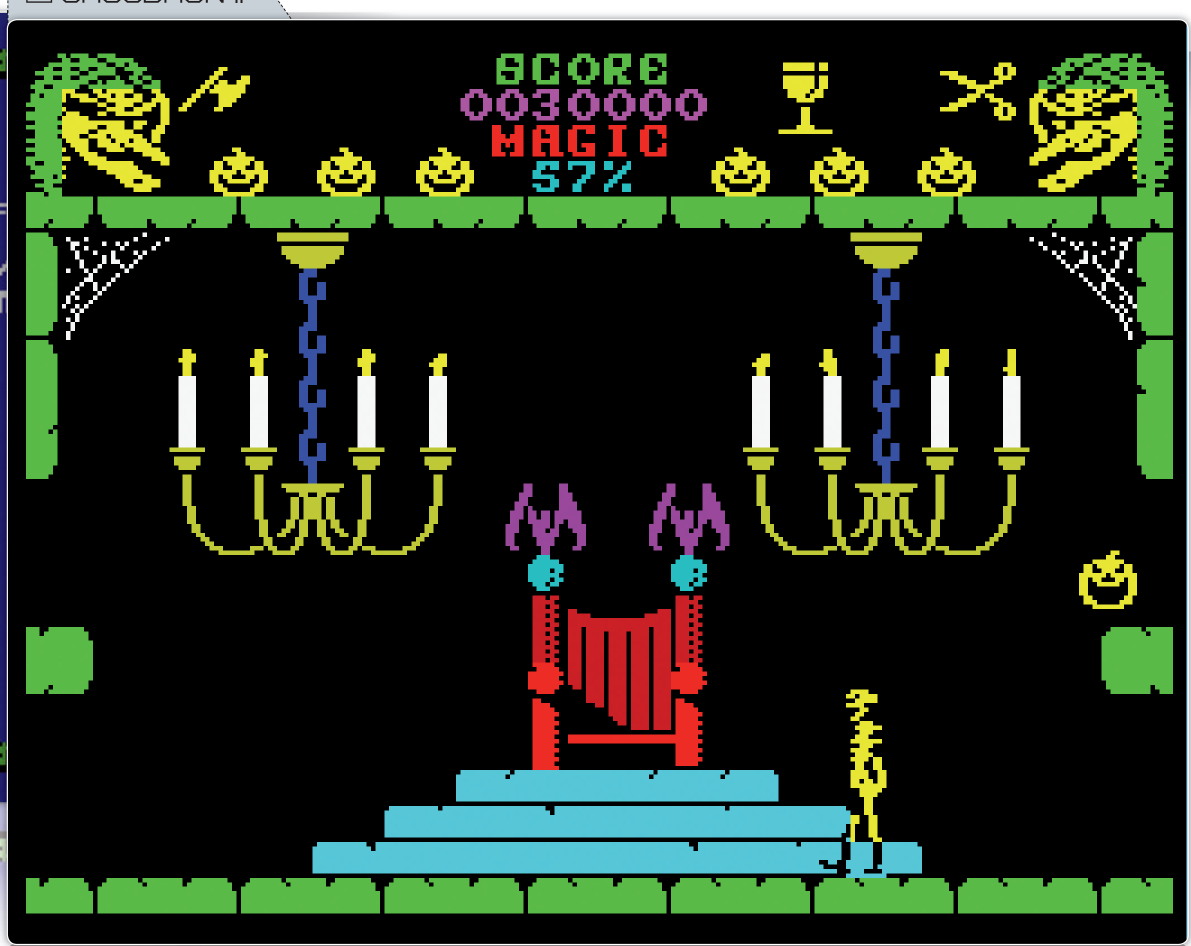
"I produced a runtime graphics engine that could draw location graphics from BASIC REM statements, which contained vector graphic commands," he remembers proudly.

Another person who sent an example game to Phipps after devouring Trevor's ZX81 book was Tony Barber.

"I was working in London for Rank Xerox at the time, as a service engineer," recalls Tony. He began by writing games in his spare time on a borrowed Sinclair ZX80. He then bought a ZX81 and sold a few games to a local computer shop, before buying the new colour Sinclair Spectrum in 1982. It was when Tony came across Trevor's *ZX81 Pocket Book* that his



CAULDRON II



fascination with adventure games began. He soon got hold of Mike Farley's *The Knight's Quest* adventure and hacked into the game, discovering how the split-screen technique worked along the way.

"I modified the ZX81 master adventure program from Trevor's book to run on a Spectrum with graphics, and then wrote a small 40-room game called *Island Adventure* and submitted it to Phipps," says Tony. "Trevor liked it and as a result he asked me to write a full game, which eventually became *Colditz*."

Having written his first commercial adventure game, Tony then went on to write three arcade games for Phipps – *Loony Zoo*, *Killer Knight* and *House Of The Living Dead* – which were then amended to run even faster using a compiler written by Trevor.

After a while, Trevor got tired of the daily commute from his home in Buckinghamshire to Epsom, and this coincided with John Phipps wanting to refocus his attention on more mainstream software endeavours.

"It was obvious at the time that the games market was sagging badly and we weren't selling as many games as before. Piracy was also becoming very trying and it just seemed to be the right time to stop," remembers John wistfully.

However, the deciding factor for Trevor was meeting the enigmatic George Stone, who had recently written a radio advert for Phipps to promote its orienteering simulator *The Forest*.

"I was introduced to George Stone and we immediately hit it off," explains Trevor fondly. "Apart from being a brilliant TV and radio copywriter, his background included being the original writer and co-creator of *Max Headroom* for Channel 4. He's extremely charismatic, and is quite simply one of the most amazing 'ideas' people you could ever meet."

> **"The market was sagging badly and we weren't selling as many games as before"**
> JOHN PHIPPS ON THE TRIALS OF THE EIGHTIES GAMES MARKET

George and Trevor shared a huge love of adventure games and comedy, and Infocom's *Zork* games in particular were favourites of theirs. They decided to combine forces and set up a new software publishing company, devoted solely to the creation of new adventure games that combined the brilliant sense of humour and tension that George was able to script, coupled with Trevor's programming skills.

"The new venture had an initial cash injection from George and me, and this gave us enough capital to find a publisher and take on Simon Dunstan as a graphic artist," explains Trevor. Simon was actually a former advertising colleague of George Stone's, as Simon reveals.

"George gave me my first job in advertising. I was an art director and occasional copywriter and my big moment was devising the national campaign for Cinzano, right after the long-running and well-loved Leonard Rossiter TV commercials had finished. A tough act to follow! So right before I started work for Trevor and George I was in Italy for a few weeks, shooting a 35mm cinema commercial."

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of Simon's new job was learning what being a computer graphic artist actually involved.

"When I first joined, I can remember Trevor trying to explain to me what a pixel was. It took me a long time before I finally got it!" remembers Simon with a smile. Thankfully, that particular stumbling block was quickly overcome, and Simon's graphics became a signature element for ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

1 The total number of published games from RamJam for the C64

2 The number of times the RamJam chicken made an appearance on packaging or loading screens

2 The number of weeks RamJam had to implement the game design for *Twice Shy* before delivery

3 The number of years that the RamJam Corporation lasted

3 The number of days spent in Carpathia, in an unfinished adventure written by George Stone

3 The number of finished adventures developed by RamJam

4 The UK TV channel that commissioned future RamJam co-owner George Stone's TV character Max Headroom

7 The games written by RamJam and published by Ariolasoft

13 The total number of different games by RamJam

17 The number included in the title of RamJam's first game, *Valkyrie 17*

100,000 The number of copies sold of future RamJam co-owner Trevor Tom's *ZX81 Pocket Book*

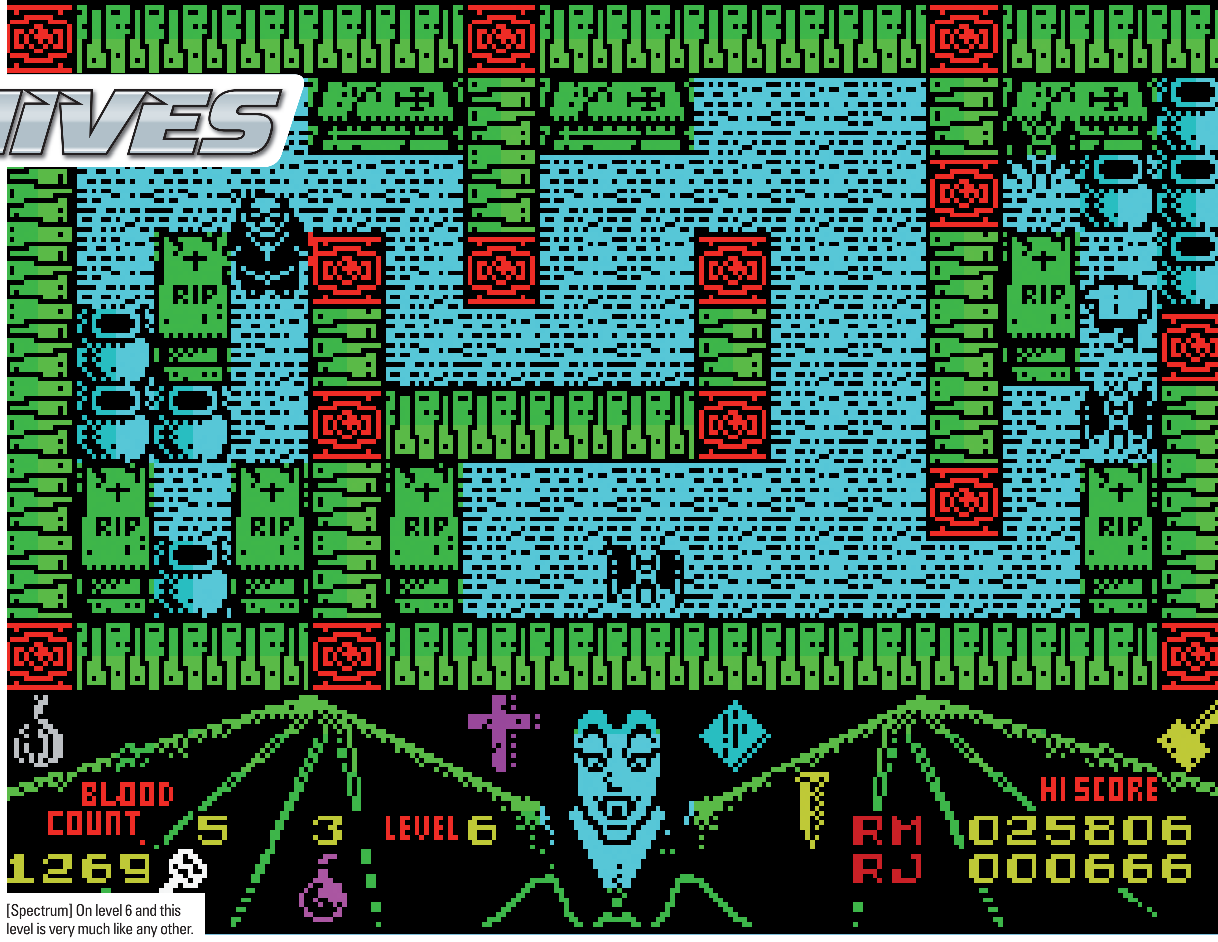
40,000,000,000 The (alleged) number of locations in *Explorer*



[Spectrum] The loading screen featured the infamous RamJam chicken wearing stirrups and a saddle.



[Spectrum] The girl at the bar isn't all that she appears to be.



[Spectrum] On level 6 and this level is very much like any other.

almost all of RamJam's 8-bit games over the next three years.

The red kipper flies at midnight

Shortly after recruiting Simon Dunstan to the cause, Tony Barber joined as RamJam's lead programmer. Trevor was still doing some programming, but he had to split his time between running the company, programming and studying for a degree at the Open University, so hiring a dedicated programmer was essential.

Tony brought with him a completely finished and playable adventure game called *The Star Of India*, which was originally offered to Phipps.

The inspiration for the game came from Tony's wife, who had suggested choosing a spy theme involving the theft of a diamond. George liked the initial premise, but thought it needed a few more elements to add excitement and recommended adding Nazis and a secret weapon into the story. Thus *The Star Of India* became *Valkyrie 17*, RamJam's first published title.

> **"Simon's 3D effect became a de facto standard for many games and DOS applications"**
> TONY BARBER ON SIMON'S INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO GRAPHICS



An early publicity photo showing RamJam signing its distribution deal with Palace for *Valkyrie 17*.

What made *Valkyrie 17* stand out from the adventure gaming crowd was not only the plot, but also the attention given to the packaging, which included a badge, copies of memos, pages from secret documents and some professionally acted recordings found on the flip-side of the cassette. George also pored over the text and tweaked it here and there.

Valkyrie 17 was distributed by Palace, and was part of a deal negotiated by George, which included Tony writing the Spectrum version of the Commodore 64 arcade hit *Cauldron* for Palace Software.

"I wrote two small programs to create the sprites and the landscapes used in the game," reflects Tony. "Originally I had the Spectrum version scrolling like the Commodore 64 game, but Palace said it was a little slow so I changed it to static screens."

"Palace Software became our first publisher and we spent time developing the initial ideas for RamJam in their studio near King's Cross station," explains Trevor. "We did eventually manage to find some office space of our own near Soho, in Central London. Although the building was relatively new, it was due to be demolished as part of a larger building project, so the rent was nice and cheap!"

Preaching to the converted

By early 1985, RamJam was being kept very busy by arcade games more than adventures. The team wrote a few more

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Trevor Toms

Trevor is technical director at GES, a company that supplies software solutions to the radio industry. Trevor is also heavily involved in a comedy band called The Ian English Boodlum Band, where he plays a number of instruments including a guitar and a banjo.

Tony Barber

Tony now works in IT for local government, where he is responsible for software development and deployment and is an expert in Novell NetWare and Zenworks. He still enjoys games on modern consoles like the Sony PS3 and the Microsoft Xbox 360, playing board games and role-playing games. Tony also builds acoustic guitars and enjoys model aircraft as well.

Simon Dunstan

Simon went on to work on the successful ITV game show *Catchphrase* for over a decade, as well as programmes like *Network 7*, *StarTest* and Channel 4's *GamesMaster*, where he used the Commodore Amiga. Today Simon runs two successful businesses producing computer animation and video and multimedia production. He has also trained as a personal coach and has a life-long interest in meditation.

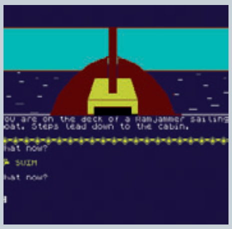
George Stone

George Stone's current whereabouts is unknown, but this hugely creative and gifted writer has been involved in a large number of projects down the years, and was last seen still being active in the advertising arena.



SIX OF THE BEST

Valkyrie 17
[1984]
While the graphics might understandably look a little basic by modern standards, the effort put into the plot, the puzzles and the packaging for *Valkyrie 17* is evident for all to see. Throw in the professionally recorded dialogue on the 'B' side and you end up with a great example of early Eighties 8-bit adventure gaming.



The Terrors Of Trantoss
[1986]
Nice detailed graphics for every location, a well-rounded fantasy plot, some good puzzles and a unique feature that allows the player to jump between two different characters means that *Trantoss* was head and shoulders over most adventures on the Spectrum. Well worth a play even now.



Twice Shy
[1986]
Considering its rushed implementation, this adventure still manages to deliver an interesting story from the eponymous Dick Francis novel, neat and tidy presentation, good graphics, and an interesting feature that allows you to load in a horse-racing simulator during the adventure and make some money on the gee-gees.



Dandy
[1986]
On the Spectrum, this game works quite well. The graphics are fine and detailed and the action is quite frenetic at times. The usual Spectrum colour issues mean that you do sometimes lose the main character against the background and the monsters, but this just hikes up the adrenaline rush!



Cauldron
[1985]
A nicely presented conversion of a Commodore 64 game. Even though continuous scrolling on the Spectrum version was abandoned early on for being too slow, the push-scroll effect still works nicely as you fly around on your broom, vanquishing bats and generally acting like a hag having a good time.



Panzadrome
[1985]
Tiny but nicely formed and very colourful graphics gives *Panzadrome* a very appealing look. Drive round the island installation battling against robot tanks, and fill in the impassable impact craters left behind with polycrete. Destroying the tanks, the plasma vents and the central computer along the way was all part of the fun.





arcade conversions, this time for German-owned Ariolasoft, which had the rights to publish Spectrum versions of EA titles in the UK and Europe, including the chess-like *Archon* and the basketball title *One On One*.

"The conversions for Ariolasoft were written using our own compiler program. In general they weren't that successful, and some of the conversions were much better than others!" admits Trevor, rather diplomatically.

Next up for RamJam was *Think!*, which was an original game published by Ariolasoft, coded by Tony but designed by Tigress Marketing, which consisted of the combined talents of David Bishop, Beth Wooding and Chris Palmer.

"The game design was given to us and the AI was worked on by a new recruit of ours called Peter Tamlyn using a Sinclair QL," remembers Tony.

"Simon's graphics for *Think!* were the first time that shading had been used to create a good 3D effect, and this style became a de facto standard for many games publishers and indeed for many DOS applications towards the end of the Eighties."

RamJam also began developing an original arcade game called *Panzadrome*, which was also published by Ariolasoft.

"I had always wanted a decent tank game on the Spectrum," says Tony. "I was in between projects and Trevor had a couple of weeks off so I decided to write one. Simon did the graphics and I designed and coded the game. After two weeks I took it to the RamJam office for everyone to see and they suggested a few things to add, like the red tanks following from screen to screen. I think it was George who came up with the game's final name: *Panzadrome: The Silicon Wars – Part IV*. I liked it because it sounded a bit *Star Wars*!"

Panzadrome got good reviews for the Spectrum and the eventual Amstrad CPC version, but the planned Commodore 64 version never appeared. The programmer hired specifically to write the conversion spent two months on the project yet produced nothing when it came to delivery. "He said he had left all his work on the train and had no backups," recalls Tony incredulously.

JAMMING THE RAM

"George Stone's reworking of the text for *Valkyrie 17* caused the game to constantly exceed the Spectrum's 48k memory," recalls Trevor Toms. "George didn't want to edit any of it, so I had to introduce text compression and a full compiler in order to fit everything in." This exercise also proved to be the inspiration behind the RamJam company name!



BIZMILLER

After *Dandy* and *The Astonishing Adventures Of Mr Weems And The She Vampires*, RamJam had one more top-down arcade game up its sleeves in the form of *Bizmiller*, a sci-fi arcade strategy game for the Spectrum that sadly failed to find a publisher before RamJam collapsed in 1987.

Bizmiller was set on a spaceship that was being eaten from the outside by space-faring parasites who had a liking for metal. The player was given control of a number of robots that could either defend against the parasites or try to repair the hull. To get the different robots working, the player had to locate key components first, and all this had to be done before the damage inflected by the parasites became critical. The creatures would pop up through the spaceship floor without warning, adding a definite scare factor to the proceedings.

Trantoss

RamJam's next release saw it return to the adventure genre with a game that featured detailed location graphics, a fantasy setting and a unique gameplay feature that hadn't been seen in a Spectrum adventure before. Mike Farley designed *The Terrors Of Trantoss* to include the ability to switch between the brothers Lobo and Scarn to solve various puzzles in the game. While Mike worked away on coding the locations and the puzzles, Simon and Trevor got to concentrate on the aesthetics of the game.

"Simon created the graphics for *Trantoss*, and I wrote a completely new rendering engine that allowed far more detail to be provided in each scene, based on combinations of graphic blocks," reveals Trevor.

The result of all their hard work was a very impressive-looking text adventure on the 48k Spectrum with detailed graphics for every location. *The Terrors Of Trantoss* received some very positive reviews when it was published in the summer of 1986, and it was highly regarded by adventure fans at the time. Oddly, no other versions were advertised or produced, meaning the game ended up being a Spectrum-only release.

The Terrors Of Trantoss also marked the end of RamJam's association with Ariolasoft, which pulled out of games publishing the following year after a series of poor releases. Thankfully for RamJam, George Stone snagged a couple of alternative publishers in the form of Mosaic and Activision's Electric Dreams publishing label.

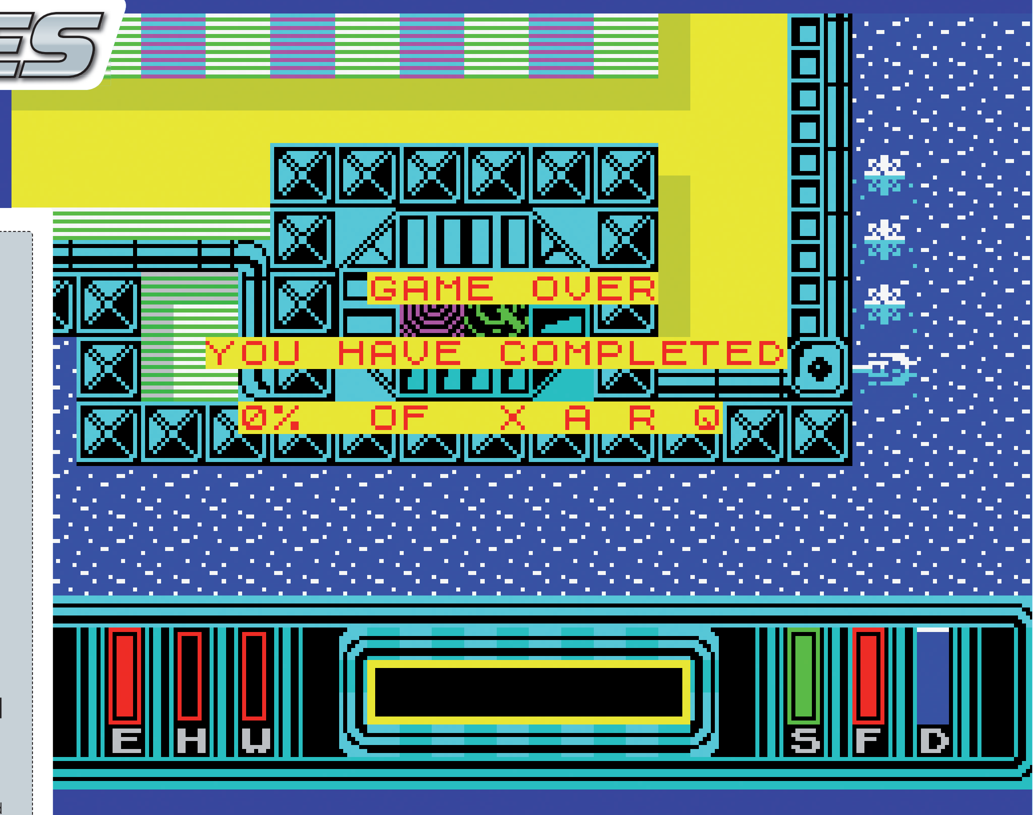
Once bitten...

RamJam should have been in its comfort zone with its next project, which was another adventure game called *Twice Shy*.

"*Twice Shy* came to us as a concept from Mosaic Publishing, who had acquired the publishing rights from Dick Francis, but with no one in RamJam being a fan of racing, George called on a manager of William Hill's he knew to create the essential script for us," admits Trevor. "Unfortunately, he failed to produce anything and blamed the tools he was given. With only two weeks to



FROM THE ARCHIVES



[Spectrum] Game over and a blessing in disguise.

THREE TO AVOID



One On One [1985]

There weren't many basketball games on the Spectrum, and if *One On One* is anything to go by it's easy to see why! One single basketball player against another is fairly tedious, but throw in basic graphics, irritating flickering 'sprites', and one static screen and there's very little reason left to recommend it.



Explorer [1986]

The graphics of the jungle and ruins are interesting at first, and the size of the world was technically impressive, but they soon become tedious. Unfortunately, the actual game itself was dull. The desire to find the spaceship parts and escape from the planet wasn't as strong as the desire to reset the computer and play something else.



The Astonishing Adventures Of Mr Weems And The She Vampires [1987]

This must qualify as one of the longest titles ever used for a Spectrum game; when re-released on budget, it was shortened to *She Vampires*. The game was a bit long, spread across six uninspiring levels that were stuffed with monsters. *Dandy* was much better.

delivery, I had to sort out the entire game from scraps of paper and a pencil-drawn map. You could say I was more than a bit miffed that he'd dropped us in it, but I was quite pleased with the end result. It was pretty much the first time that I'd used all my tools for a real purpose!"

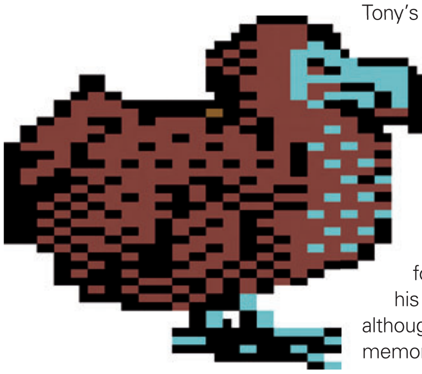
Twice Shy also featured a simple horse-racing game on the other side of the cassette, which gave the player some cash and six horse races to bet on, with four horses in each race. They could study a horse and then compare its strengths and weaknesses against the going, the weather conditions, and the distance of the course. Although the game could be played on its own, it could also be played as an integral part of the adventure by typing the command 'race' and then loading it in from the flip-side of the tape.

Sub-aqua

RamJam's next arcade game was *Aquadrome*, which was Tony's follow-up to his earlier *Panzadrome* success,

> **"Working for RamJam was one of the nicest times of my working life"**
> TONY BARBER REMINISCES ABOUT HIS TIME AT RAMJAM

featuring boats this time rather than tanks. It was also the first of three RamJam games published by Electric Dreams, but it ultimately proved to be Tony's last game.



"*Aquadrome* was all my work again, with Simon once more doing the graphics. I handed in the final version of the game and that's when I parted ways with RamJam," remembers Tony sadly.

Behind-the-scenes financial issues were the main reason for his decision to leave and take his skills to the freelance market, although Tony still has extremely fond memories of his time at RamJam and still holds his former colleagues in very high regard.

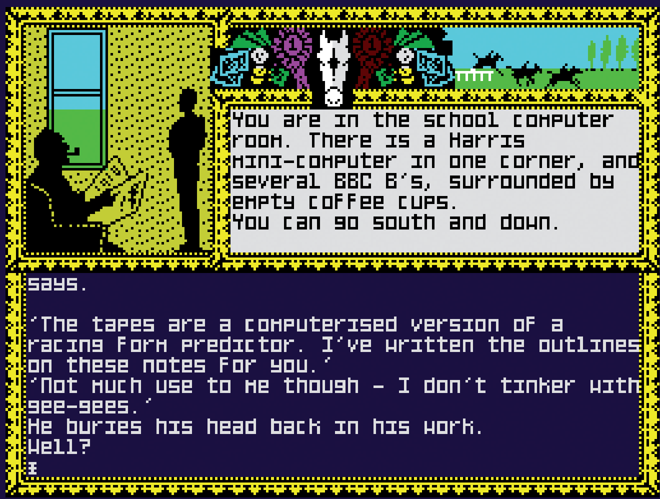
"In my opinion Trevor is one of the brainiest guys I have ever had the pleasure of working with. George Stone was one of the brightest minds and Simon is a great artist and all-round nice guy. Working for RamJam was one of the nicest times of my working life."

When it came to publication on the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, *Aquadrome* experienced a name change that Tony has always found a little puzzling, as he explains: "I have no idea why it wasn't called *Aquadrome: The Silicon Wars – Part V* when it was published. I always thought *Xarq* was a strange choice!"

Ironically, the main criticism aimed at *Xarq: The Zimmerman Trenches* when it was released was that it was nothing more than an inferior clone of *Panzadrome*. For reasons best known to Electric Dreams, RamJam was not explicitly credited as being the developer in the packaging, so some magazine journalists were unaware of the game's heritage.

TIMELINE

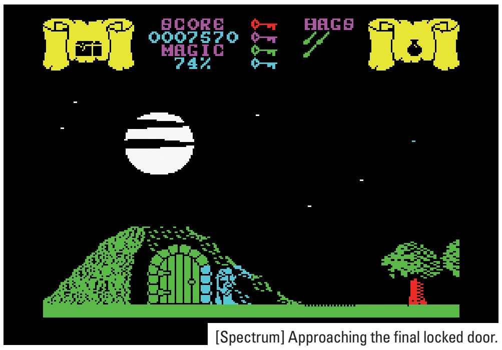
- 1984 GEORGE STONE AND TREVOR TOMS SET UP THE RAMJAM CORPORATION
- 1984 SIMON DUNSTAN AND TONY BARBER JOIN RAMJAM
- 1984 *VALKYRIE 17* PUBLISHED ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1985 *VALKYRIE 17* PUBLISHED ON THE COMMODORE 64
- 1985 *CAULDRON* CONVERSION PUBLISHED BY PALACE ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1985 *ARCHON* CONVERSION PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1985 *ONE ON ONE* CONVERSION PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1985 *PANZADROME* PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1986 *THINK!* PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1986 *PANZADROME* PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE AMSTRAD CPC
- 1986 *THINK!* PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE AMSTRAD CPC
- 1986 *THE TERRORS OF TRANTOSS* PUBLISHED BY ARIOLASOFT ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1986 TONY BARBER LEAVES RAMJAM
- 1986 *CAULDRON II* CONVERSION PUBLISHED BY PALACE ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1986 *XARQ* PUBLISHED BY ELECTRIC DREAMS ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1986 *DANDY* PUBLISHED BY ELECTRIC DREAMS ON THE SPECTRUM
- 1987 *TWICE SHY* PUBLISHED BY MOSAIC ON THE AMSTRAD CPC
- 1987 *EXPLORER* PUBLISHED BY ELECTRIC DREAMS ON SPECTRUM/AMSTRAD CPC



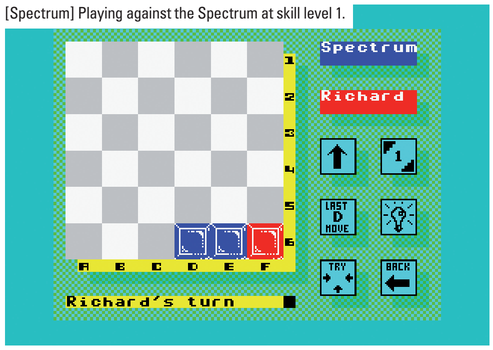
[Spectrum] Wonder where this racing form predictor program could be used…


Tony Barber in his everyday attire.


Trevor Toms in his band.



[Spectrum] Approaching the final locked door.



[Spectrum] Playing against the Spectrum at skill level 1.

Not so fine and dandy

Electric Dreams also signed RamJam for the conversion of *Dandy* to the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64. *Dandy* was an old Atari 800 top-down dungeon-crawling game that was part-inspiration for the coin-op designers at Atari when they created the *Gauntlet* series.

Dandy was signed by Electric Dreams at a time when publisher US Gold had just paid for the official *Gauntlet* licence from Atari. RamJam was given a large amount of freedom to update the graphics and redesign the dungeon levels, which ultimately left little of the original *Dandy* game intact.

Some 23 years later, Trevor can't remember whether the CPC conversion was ever finished by RamJam, but it's likely that Electric Dream's own in-house development team, Software Studios, was drafted in to help. However, Trevor does remember what happened to RamJam's Commodore 64 conversion.

"That version of *Dandy* never made it. Although I'd started rewriting my compiler for the Commodore 64, it was never fully completed for handling sprites or sound on that platform."

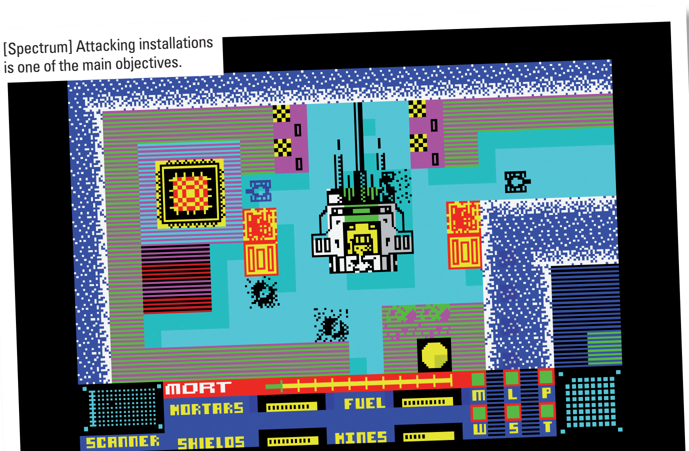
In the end, the publisher hired Nick Pelling to write the Commodore 64 version at very short notice. Nick was given the graphics and the level designs and was ably assisted by Mike Bryant in getting it all into shape. The sound effects were quickly created by poking random values into the C64 sound chip until they came up with vaguely interesting noises.

Creating the game code from scratch in two weeks flat was an astonishing effort from Nick. Unfortunately, the publisher made a mess of the packaging and so, unlike the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions and despite all the hard work, the Commodore 64 version of *Dandy* missed its Christmas 1986 release date anyway.

Exploring the possibilities

One of Phipps Associates more unusual releases was an orienteering simulation called *The Forest*, written by cartographer Graham Relf. Three years later, RamJam developed Graham's follow-up, called *Explorer*, for Electric Dreams. Claiming to include 40 billion different locations, the game had a science fiction plot wrapped around an exploration game searching for parts of a spaceship.

Simon Dunstan remembers a particularly amusing story from near the end of the game's development: "We took *Explorer* to a military research establishment, signing the Official Secrets Act and having a look at their landscape visualisation system. It cost millions of quid, was several rooms full of mainframes, and had lots of chaps in white coats with clipboards," says Simon with a grin. "After they'd shown me theirs, I showed them ours and I have to say it was a lot smaller – mostly consisting of a 48k ZX Spectrum! What was weird was they were very impressed with the way we generated landscapes with user-defined graphics and a simple algorithm."



[Spectrum] Attacking installations is one of the main objectives.

16-BIT BIROS

The various tools that constituted later versions of The Biro were adapted and used after RamJam's demise to help create the HP Lovecraft-inspired 16-bit adventure *The Hound Of Shadow*, created by Chris Elliot and Richard Edwards (Eldritch Games) and published by Electronic Arts for the ST, Amiga and PC in 1989. The game looked like a traditional text adventure but included a role-playing element called Timeline, which allowed the player to choose a profession and an ability that would come into play later on in the game.

The Biro was also being used in the development of an abandoned 16-bit superhero comic book adventure game called *The Acrobat*, written by Mike Lewis, who originally collaborated on the early Melbourne House comic book adventures *Kwah!* and *Red Hawk*. *The Acrobat* would have been published by Rainbird Software for the ST, Amiga and PC and was in development throughout 1988/89.



While the game might have been technically very clever, it wasn't enjoyable to play at all; magazine reviews for *Explorer* were very poor. The prospect of wandering around the wilderness of a huge planet for ages didn't appeal to the journalists or the average games player.

RamJam wobbles

The seemingly healthy portfolio of adventure games, arcade titles and conversion work should have put RamJam in good stead for long-term survival, but in reality things were nearly always a little financially precarious. Tony Barber's recollections give a possible clue as to why RamJam came to a premature end.

"We seemed to take on more work than we could manage at times, and some of the additional staff that were taken on turned out to be unreliable, and important deadlines were often missed."

The company's demise finally came in the run-up to the summer of 1987, as Simon Dunstan remembers all too clearly.

"The end was sad, but the business became financially impossible," he admits. At the very end, Simon struggled to get RamJam's final game – *The Astonishing Adventures Of Mr Weems And The She Vampires* – out the door. By the time the game had finally been published by Piranha, RamJam had already closed down.

"The collapse of a company always creates suffering, and RamJam was no exception," recalls Trevor. "However, I thoroughly enjoyed my time there and will always regret that we couldn't resolve the financial pressures to take it on into the modern gaming world."



SPACE CHANNEL 5

For many, Sega's Dreamcast was the best console the company ever produced, offering a variety of stunningly original titles that immediately made the machine stand apart from its peers. *Space Channel 5* is one such title, and it's one that just gets better with age. It's a game that marries a deceptively simplistic rhythm-action mechanic to some of the most spectacular and, let's face it, funky music this side of *PaRappa The Rapper*. Created by the legendary Tetsuya Mizuguchi, who would go on to blend his love of music and videogames with the likes of *Rez*, *Lumines*, *Meteos* and *Every Extend Extra*, *Space Channel 5* is a refreshingly unique release that still feels as fresh as a proverbial daisy. How could you not love it?



PUDDING

Ulala's rival. Pudding is a reporter from Channel 42 and is the first character that Ulala faces off against in her bid to become the ultimate reporter. Pudding later teams up with Ulala to stop a brainwashed Chief Blank from starting the alien invasion on *Space Channel 5*'s final stage.



SPACE DIVA

This sultry female can be found on the second level of *Space Channel 5* and is being kidnapped by some of those pesky Morolians. Fortunately, their dance routines are fairly straightforward and aren't too difficult to decipher, so the diva is easily rescued from her alien captors.



JAGUAR

Jaguar rescued Ulala many years ago, which set her on the path to wanting to become a reporter for the legendary Space Channel 5. He now runs a pirate radio station and, despite getting on in age, still has what it takes when he faces off against our plucky heroine.

WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's the music game that never gets dull

Rhythm-action games come and go, but like the aforementioned *PaRappa The Rapper,* Ulala's adventure remains fantastically refreshing to play. By keeping the controls simplistic, Mizuguchi was able to create a title that anyone could pick up and play but couldn't master without extensive play. Brilliant music, charming characters, epic bosses and a kooky storyline all combine to create one of the most mesmerising experiences on Sega's console. The fact that we're still returning to it a decade later tells you everything you need to know. Is *Space Channel 5* going to become a timeless classic? You betcha.

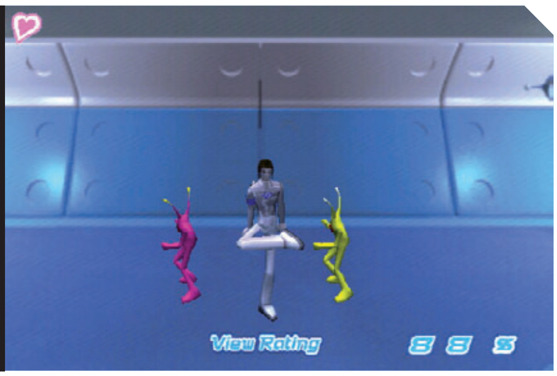
BEST CHARACTER



The girl in the tight orange skirt

With a spray-on dress, gloss-coated lips and an extremely sexy voice, it's Ulala without a shadow of a doubt. Allegedly based on Deee-Lite's Lady Miss Kier – she raised an unsuccessful lawsuit against Sega after claiming that it offered her $16,000 to license her name and image – Ulala's strong attitude and fantastic dance moves have made her a role model to female gamers and an object of lust to males. And yes, we're fully aware that she's not real. With her girl power image, shocking crop of pink hair and carefree attitude, it's little wonder that so many Ulala's crop up whenever there's a cosplay event in town.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Meet Michael Jackson…

You're approaching the end of the game and as you turn a corner you come face to face with none other than Michael Jackson, who, as many readers will know, was a big fan of Sega's gaming output. Known as Space Michael and actually voiced by the King of Pop himself, it's a nuttily surreal moment that's typical of *Space Channel 5*'s quirky humour. Sadly, Space Michael doesn't stick around for too long, although he does have a far larger role in the 2002 sequel. Good luck finding a copy though, as allegations against Jackson at the time meant that Sony and Sega pulled the PS2 and Dreamcast UK releases.

BEST MUSIC



The rhythm is gonna getcha

The music of *Space Channel 5* covers a wide variety of styles and genres, and although some of the boss battles are particularly mesmerising, it's the first that we constantly return to. It's a magnificent number that instantly captures your attention and, like later levels, continually changes in style based on how well Ulala is doing. Easily our favourite section, however, is when you face off against Pudding and finally beat her. You immediately gain control of her guitarist, who lays some meaty riffs over the tune. It's a fantastic moment and is typical of Mizuguchi's ear for music and the game's slick presentation.

BEST STAGE



Asteroids, psychedelic walls and more

For sheer variety you can't go wrong with level 3. Starting off in a huge asteroid field, Ulala uses a flying disk to negotiate the space debris, before facing off against flying space bikes and Jaguar. A mind-warping trip through a psychedelic tunnel has the pink-haired reporter facing off against Pudding again, before she finally infiltrates the enemy base and encounters one of *Space Channel 5*'s most memorable adversaries: a weird rubber alien that splits in two. When the base has been destroyed, it's time for Ulala to make a speedy retreat from a giant fireball that threatens to engulf her. Top stuff.

BEST BOSS



Enter Evila

Space Channel 5's fourth boss is an evil replica of Ulala that's been created by Chief Blank to finish off the galaxy's most gorgeous reporter once and for all. She has some devilishly tricky routines that are so fast that they can be easily missed, and it takes a fair amount of practice to beat her. Eventually she'll outsmart you and you'll get knocked to the ground and given two more attempts to beat the evil crone. Successfully complete either of her routines and you'll move on to a showdown with Blank. Fail and Space Channel 5 gets shut down for good.



What the press said… ages ago

GameSpot 7/10

"Beyond a few unlockable character profiles, there isn't much replay value – in fact, you'll probably find yourself tiring of mimicking the aliens' moves long before you finish the game."

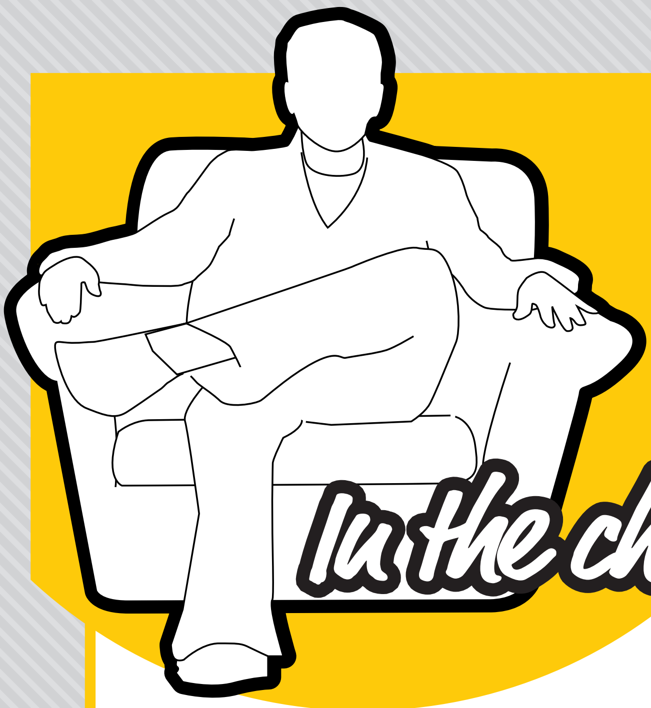
What we think

We disagree. Yes, *Space Channel 5* is short and lightweight, but for us that's where the charm lies. The fact that it's incredibly short just means we can get even more games with Ulala in, which is fine with us.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** DREAMCAST
- **DEVELOPER:** UNITED GAME ARTISTS
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1999
- **GENRE:** RHYTHM-ACTION
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

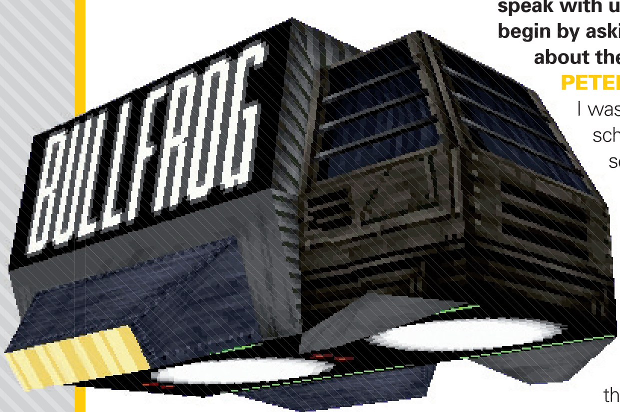


In the chair with...

PETER MOLYNEUX

He is widely regarded as the most important person in the UK videogame industry and boasts an unequalled career of producing groundbreaking games. It's taken us three years, but we finally got him. Peter Molyneux speaks exclusively to Retro Gamer for his most candid interview yet

SPEND A MINUTE in his company and you'll understand why Peter Molyneux is the "top of the B-set" – his words, by the way; not ours – in terms of game design. Populous, Syndicate, Theme Park, Black & White and Fable – whether they lived up to expectations or not, they are some of the most innovative computer games in history, and with Microsoft's Project Natal just around the corner, Peter is preparing for what is unarguably his most radical project to date with Milo & Kate. Stuart Hunt spent an afternoon with Peter at his Lionhead Studios where they discussed everything from Peter's prolific career in the industry and the dangers of hype to exporting baked beans to the Middle East.



RETRO GAMER: Peter, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak with us today. We always begin by asking interviewees about their school days…

PETER MOLYNEUX: Well I was a pretty untalented school kid. I think my school report said that I was cheerfully disinterested in pretty much everything. I was dyslexic before they really had dyslexia – before it was officially categorised – and that meant I was in the bottom stream for pretty much everything. I used to just kick around and kind of be in my own world more than the real one.

RG: Did you enjoy your time at school?

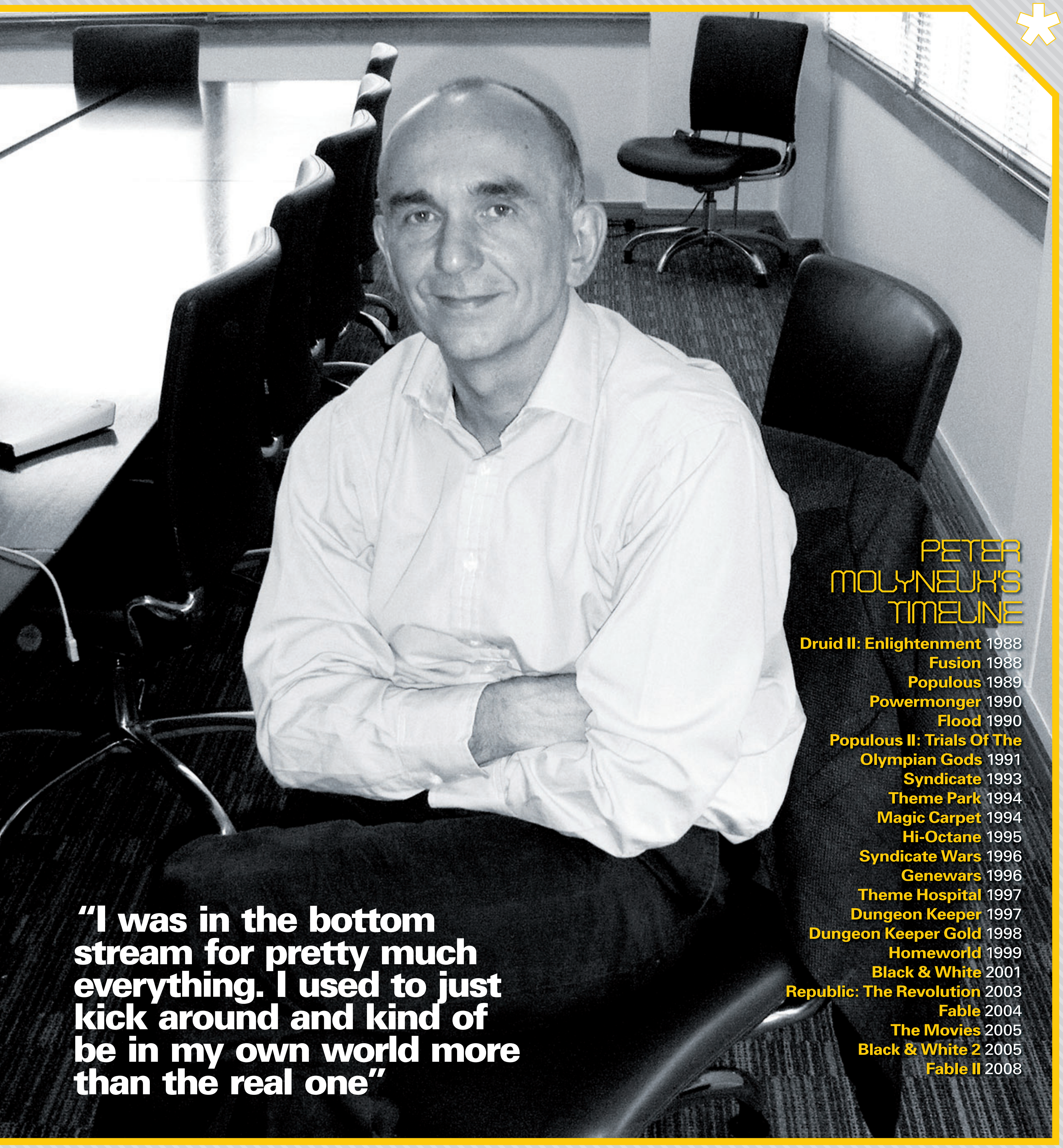
PM: I thought I didn't but actually, looking back, I think I did. I was famous in school for one thing: I was the least achieving student they ever had. The careers advisor once said to me that I might as well go into the Forestry Commission or the army as I'd be somewhere where they don't require you to have any writing skills. There was a big long list of where people were and I was at the bottom of everything.

RG: That's surprising. So what did you do after you left school?

PM: Part of me thinks that I might have been abducted by aliens and something happened to this completely talentless kid, because the only passion I had was this bizarre belief that I was going to be successful and run my own business. I don't know where that came from. I left school and suddenly became uber-ambitious and very driven. I began using computers for the first time and finally found something I could do reasonably well and really enjoyed. The first time I used a computer was the first time the world really went dim – the outside world, that is – and it was just me and the computer.

RG: Can you tell us about your first job and how it was that you got into programming?

PM: After I left school I went to Farnborough Technical College where I got a few O Levels and later I took a degree in computer science. When I left I decided I was going to take a gap year, but it turned out to be a gap weekend because when I went down to sign on I was asked to interview for a job. The guy who interviewed me owned one of the biggest sport mail-order retailers in the world, which probably wasn't really saying much because there were probably only about three of them back then, and offered me the job straight away. Well, the funny thing was this guy wanted to computerise his business, and so went over to America and brought back a whole load of computer equipment. And because he was such an entrepreneur he also bought himself a book on how to program. But he had only read the first ten chapters, and this was very important because chapter 11 was about something called array programming, and arrays are ways of holding lots of information. Because he hadn't read that chapter he had



"I was in the bottom stream for pretty much everything. I used to just kick around and kind of be in my own world more than the real one"

PETER MOLYNEUX'S TIMELINE

Druid II: Enlightenment 1988
Fusion 1988
Populous 1989
Powermonger 1990
Flood 1990
Populous II: Trials Of The Olympian Gods 1991
Syndicate 1993
Theme Park 1994
Magic Carpet 1994
Hi-Octane 1995
Syndicate Wars 1996
Genewars 1996
Theme Hospital 1997
Dungeon Keeper 1997
Dungeon Keeper Gold 1998
Homeworld 1999
Black & White 2001
Republic: The Revolution 2003
Fable 2004
The Movies 2005
Black & White 2 2005
Fable II 2008

this massive thick pile of listings on his computer. Had he read that section he would have realised that the whole of that much of programming – like 10,000 lines of code – could have been done in five lines. When I told him this he thought I was a genius and handed all the computer stuff over to me. I stayed there for about two years and when I left he set me up in business selling floppy disks to schools, and on these floppy disks would be games that I had written. Well, it just goes to show how stupid you are when you've got no experience because it was obvious that the schools didn't want the floppy disks; they wanted the games.

RG: What kind of games were these?

PM: They were really kind of rubbish, educational games. There was one game that I wrote called *The Composer*, and this was my first officially published game ever. I'd written it as this little application, and any programmer could do it in an afternoon. I took it to this company in Alton and they said they would order 2,000 copies of this game from me, but asked if they could have them in a week's time. Well, I didn't do the sensible thing of phoning up a tape manufacturer; I went down to my local electronics store, bought two tape decks, some wire and did it all manually. And you can imagine how long that took. I had this huge, massive stack of tapes before thinking I'd better test a few. When I did, I discovered that I'd plugged the lead into the wrong socket and

* FIVE TO PLAY

POPULOUS



[Amiga] *Populous* inadvertently ushered in the 'god sim'.

WHILE IT WASN'T Peter's first published game – that honour goes to the music-themed educational program *The Composer* – *Populous* was the game that kick-started his prolific career in the industry and remains one of the designer's most seminal and fondly remembered games. During our chat, Peter revealed to us that he originally didn't set out to make the god game with *Populous*, but rather stumbled upon the idea because of his lack of ability as a games designer – basically, he couldn't get the little men in the game to move along the coast in the game world, so he decided to allow players to manipulate the land instead. But regardless of how the idea behind the game came about, *Populous* was superb, and a unique and important landmark in the evolution of game design. It's also the game Peter said he would most like to return to one day.

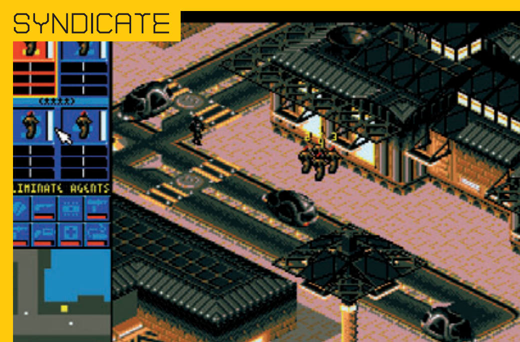
THEME PARK



[Amiga] *Theme Park* remains Peter's biggest hit.

PETER TOLD US that *Theme Park* was his most successful game, and we're not surprised. In many ways, *Theme Park* harked back to those very early days of Peter's programming career, where he was creating educational software for schools and selling them on disks. But *Theme Park* boasted this fantastic attention-grabbing hook: you could manage and run your very own theme park. By keeping your customers happy, by managing everything from staffing levels and the safety and thrill-level of rides to even how much salt you sprinkled into junk food, *Theme Park* offered an incredibly unique and addictive experience, and it deservedly became a hit.

SYNDICATE



[Amiga] Glum, gritty but bloody brilliant.

KEEPING WITH THE isometric perspective, Bullfrog's *Syndicate* was a huge departure in terms of premise, visuals and gameplay – this time you could actually move the little men around the game world. The sedate greenery of *Populous* was replaced with a glum, oppressive steampunk universe, usurped by corrupt corporations with the help of cybernetic agents loaded to the teeth with high-tech weaponry and body augments. With a look and story inspired by classic sci-fi cinema, most notably *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, *Syndicate*'s adult themes, unique visuals and free-form gameplay struck a chord with Amiga owners back in the day.

BLACK & WHITE



[PC] One of the most highly anticipated PC games ever.

BLACK & WHITE was the first game Peter released for Lionhead and began life in a similar way to *Populous*. The basic premise of *Black & White* found you playing the role of a god who rules and manages a fantastical world with a floating hand. With the hovering feeler, the player could interact and win favour with tribesmen and women, and even get to influence the acts and behaviour of a giant creature that wandered the game world. *Black & White* attracted a large amount of attention before its release, and Peter admits that the high level of expectation it garnered meant that it was always going to disappoint some on its release.

FABLE



[Xbox] Be a nice guy or a complete tyrant? You decide.

ONE OF THE greatest modern RPG franchises, *Fable*'s success and quality was overshadowed by criticism, following Peter's hype and enthusiasm for the game during its development. As a result, Peter publicly apologised on an official message board for features that never made it into the finished game. *Fable* was nevertheless a fantastic and wonderfully polished game and, like *Black & White*, featured impressive and unique things that had never been tried or seen before in videogames. The most notable being the fact that your hero's actions would greatly affect his appearance and rapport with other characters in the game.

had to redo them all again.

RG: What happened? Did you make the order in time?

PM: I did and the company took the tapes, but after waiting for payment for over a month and having spent every single penny I had on these blank tapes, they brought me in and said they weren't going to pay me because they were in financial problems. And I think I did actually cry, rather embarrassingly. But the funny thing was, eight years later, after I had released *Populous* and had some money, I went round to look at these lovely houses and one of the properties I looked at was this guy's house who owned this company in Alton. I walked in and he didn't recognise me. And when I asked him why he was selling the house he told me he had gone bankrupt. 'It took you eight years, then, to go bankrupt, did it?' I said. 'Well you owe me money for these tapes!'

RG: You didn't buy his house, then?

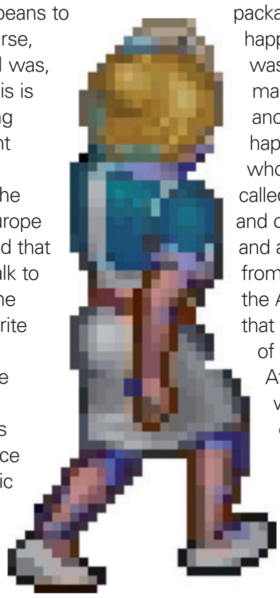
PM: No, I didn't.

RG: Can you tell us about how it was you met Les Edgar, whom you set up Bullfrog with?

PM: Well this company who I was employed at used a shop called PJ Hi-Fi to get their computer supplies, and this is where Les worked. When I eventually left the company, Les suggested we start a company up. I had met this girl at a wedding – a previous girlfriend – and her father was this enormously wealthy bloke who lived in Switzerland. Well, one day I met this girl's father and he asked me if I'd be interested in a business proposition. The business was exporting money systems – the things that go in slot machines – to Switzerland and baked beans to the Middle East. Of course, being the entrepreneur I was, I accepted. But – and this is where it all starts coming together – this one event happened. One day the phone rang and it was the head of Commodore Europe on the other line. He said that he would really like to talk to us about the future of the Amiga, and could we write a commercial piece of software, like a database or spreadsheet, for the machine? He brought us up to his main head office and gave us this fantastic demonstration of the Amiga, six or seven free Amigas, plus space and a stand at this expo show in Germany. It became very obvious that he'd actually got the wrong company. Our company was called Taurus and there was another company that made networking products named Torus, and he'd phoned the wrong one. So we kind of bluffed it out, all these Amigas arrived, and it started this whole process off where they were really actively supporting us and I started writing this database called Acquisition.

RG: What happened? Did Commodore ever twig and come asking for its computers back?

PM: Well they kept on threatening to shut us down and asking if they could see this product, so I was frantically writing this database while putting them off with excuse after excuse. Eventually I'd finished enough of this database package and we showed it at this show in Germany. I had approached this database package in the way that you approach a game; it was full of unique features. You could store pictures in it, store documents and there weren't any field size restrictions. And I had all these other database firms queuing up to see it. In the end we won product of good luck show and sold 2,000 copies to this company in America, which gave us enough money to keep going for a while. But we knew our dream of making millions from these database packages wasn't going to happen because the Amiga was fast becoming a games machine. But that's when another bit of good luck happened. I had this friend who had made this game called *Druid II: Enlightenment*, and one day he came to me and asked if I could convert it from the Commodore 64 to the Amiga, which I did, and that got me into the ethos of how games are written. After *Druid II*, though, we were really running out of money by that point, and Les came to me and said, 'This is not working. We might as well close the company down.' And I said, 'Look, let's give it a few months. I've got this idea for a game.' And this was *Populous*.



> “Populous was like it was due to my incompetence”



» Peter inside the boardroom at Lionhead Studios.

RG: Where did the idea for *Populous* come from?

PM: Well, there's been lots of stories I've given about that, about playing with Lego and about ants nests, and those were all important influences in the idea, but the real reason *Populous* was like it was, was purely and utterly due to my incompetence as a games programmer, because the real feature that was important in *Populous* was the ability to raise the land, and the reason that feature was there was because I couldn't get the little people to navigate around the coast. So I just thought, 'Fu*k it! I won't get them navigating around the coast. I'll just have it so the player gets to raise the land instead.' It was because I couldn't work out how to do that one thing that the raising the land idea came up and I thought, 'Well, what sort of thing could do that? I know: a god.'

RG: Were you ever confident that *Populous* was going to be a commercial success?

PM: No, you've got to remember that almost everything I touched in my life had failed up to that point. I was just this person who tried lots of different things – be it exporting

baked beans to the Middle East and money systems to Switzerland, games on disks or the *Composer* game – and they'd all failed. So I never expected *Populous* to be a success; even to the point where a reviewer from *ACE* – I think it was – came over to see us one day and I remember thinking, 'Oh, God, what do I do with this bloke?' I'd read *ACE* time and time again so this guy was famous in my eyes. In the end I thought, 'I'm going to have to get him drunk', and so we went down the pub and got slaughtered. I was dying to find out what he thought of *Populous*, so when I was almost to the state of vomiting over him I asked him. He said it was the single greatest game he'd ever played. And my single thought at that point was that he must never play the game again because if he does he'll realise that actually it's not. [laughs]

RG: So you still had doubts about *Populous* even then, even when it was garnering great reviews and selling well?

PM: I still have my doubts even now about the stuff I do. And this sounds a bit simpering, but it's absolutely true. When you're told as a kid you're completely useless and then you leave school and don't do anything for a few years that stays with you. And actually, I think that was the thing that drove me: being able to prove that maybe I can do something.

RG: Surely your confidence in your ability and skill has grown over the course of your career?

PM: Look, I'll give you an analogy of what *Populous* is in my mind. Imagine if I had a blank canvas. Some people that are true artists will take a palette of paint and mix them together and carefully hand-craft each and every single brushstroke until they have this beautiful and amazing picture. And then there's me. I had the blank canvas, accidentally knocked a can of paint over, and it went splat. And an art dealer has seen it and said, 'That's brilliant.' Well, I know all I've done is kick a can of paint. And that's what I believe really happened with *Populous*.

RG: But then how do you explain your subsequent success?

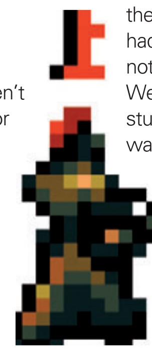
PM: I think I'm on top of the B-set.

RG: Can you tell us about the time you decided to set up Bullfrog?

PM: Well Bullfrog had been set up before the release of *Populous*, as a brand of Taurus. I think we did that because we didn't want people to get confused with money-making opportunities for business software. Bullfrog existed as a brand and released *Populous*.

RG: So talk us though those fledging years at Bullfrog.

PM: Well that was a really amazing time for two important reasons. The first is that there was this period of, 'Oh my god, we're going to have all this money' – but unfortunately the publishers omitted to say that they weren't going to pay us any money for 18 months, which was very frustrating. And then there was this second period when all the money came in and we started to grow the company. Some people we employed are still here today. And if I've had lucky breaks – and you've heard some of the lucky breaks I've had – then the next one was these people. They were just amazingly talented and didn't mind trying the kind of stuff that was a bit insane, which was a lot of what I was interested in.



RG: How did you go about finding this talent?

PM: Well some of it was luck, but Bullfrog was also getting this reputation of being this amazing place, the creator of *Populous*, so we had people knocking on our door. Some of it, though, was just me going out, seeing an artist that I enjoyed and offering him a job. Then, after a little while, we were looking for programmers so I visited universities and started pitching to graduates. I went to Cambridge and stood up to the computer scientists there, and against all these banks that had these fantastic offices said, 'Why not come to the games industry? We've got shit offices but you invent stuff.' But bringing in talented people was the reason for Bullfrog's success.

RG: I heard a story that you used to play *Space Invaders* with interns at Bullfrog. Is that true?

PM: There's this idea whereby it's very hard to say whether you're making a good game or a bad game, so I had this idea of bringing in these kids – and in those days we were just incredibly unprofessional; we weren't this professional company we are today. So these kids used to come in and we would just abuse them horribly. We'd line them up like *Space Invaders* and shoot them with BB guns. I mean viciously shoot them. In the end we had to stop because one of them was almost blinded. In fact, the first proper office we had we almost got thrown out of because we used to have these gun battles in the corridors and it was one of these shared office spaces.

RG: Did you rein in that sense of fun in the office?

PM: We were brats. Horrible, horrible brats. If you were a parent you wouldn't want your child to work on our work experience program. But we had an enormous amount of fun back then, and we were proper hardcore games programmers. I had a huge ashtray that was mountain high with cigarette butts. I mean it was ridiculous. I think to finish one of the

> "I still have my doubts even now about what I do. It sounds simpering, but it's true"



[Amiga] *Populous* was released on everything from the PC-Engine to the Game Boy.

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

Peter got paid **£4,000** to convert Druid II to the C64

Lionhead Studios was formed in **1997** and acquired by Microsoft in **2006**

Theme Park was released in **1994**, and it remains Peter's bestselling game

ACE (Advanced Computer Entertainment) magazine awarded Populous an 'Ace rating' of **963** in issue **19**. We can't fathom the score either, but it sure sounds impressive

There are **15** giant animals available to the player in Black & White, and a further **4** creatures if you can hack the game

Peter received an OBE in **2004** and an honorary degree from the University of Southampton in **2007**

It's tenuous, but both Peter and his son are fans of Valve games and Peter won't allow his son to play the studio's recent zombie smash, Left **4** Dead



» [Amiga] Released a year prior to *Populous II*, *Powermonger* was deemed the true spiritual successor to *Populous*.

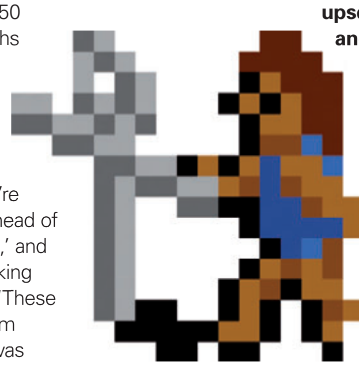
games we were doing we all stayed up for over 50 hours with no sleep. It was an insane time where part of it was this amazing feeling that you were doing something which was going to be successful and the other was this enormous amount of pressure. It was good but also incredibly destructive. You were always completely exhausted, and there was never any life outside of it.

RG: We also heard that at Bullfrog you approached each game from a multiplayer angle. Is that true?

PM: Yes, that's true. *Populous, Powermonger, Syndicate* and *Magic Carpet* all featured network play. That was actually above and beyond the call of duty to do that stuff back then. But we did it, and a lot of the games were balanced around that because that's how we tested them: we'd play against each other.

RG: Bullfrog was eventually bought by Electronic Arts. Could you tell us about that period?

PM: Well, there were about 35 of us, and we were a little more like a proper company. Then suddenly this amazing thing started happening. These people kept phoning us up and saying, 'If you're ever thinking of selling your company, give us a call. We're very interested.' We didn't take it seriously at first, but then these big companies – Philips, Electronic Arts – approached us, and we were being flown all over the world. Suddenly it was, 'Geez, what alternative reality have we gone into there!' Eventually Electronic Arts bought us, and that's when something very wrong happened to me. There was me, this passionate 16 hours a day coder, who kind of lived with these other blokes who were in the office, and all of a sudden Electronic Arts came in and said, 'Okay, right, we think you're fantastic, we want you to expand your studio, and rather than one game can we get five games out of you.' The company literally went from 35 people to 150 people in nine months and suddenly there were all these strangers there. Then they said to me, 'We think you're fantastic. We're going to make you head of our studio in Europe,' and part of me was thinking this was amazing – 'These people really think I'm clever' – but there was another part of me that felt awful, that this was alien and horrible to me. This went on for a few years; Studio Europe was set up and *Theme Park* was released, and I'd sort of hibernated back to my house to finish the game and try to get back to the old days. But the whole of the foundation stones of my work completely changed. In the end this very strange thing happened. I said to Electronic Arts that I wanted to leave and I was exiled from Bullfrog. And that was a really distressing time. They set up the whole team at my house and I just wasn't permitted to go into the office. Which sounds harsh, but in their mind they were scared I was going to take everybody off them and go and do something else. It was while we were finishing *Dungeon Keeper* that Mark Webley, Tim Rance, Steve Jackson and I met down the pub and said, 'Let's start a company called Lionhead.'



RG: Why was this period so upsetting for you, and how difficult was taking the decision to leave Bullfrog?

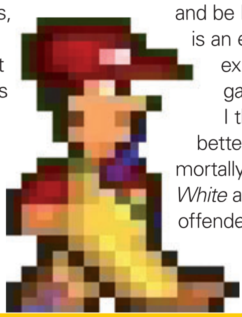
PM: Well I was still making games that were successful but I lived, breathed and ate programming, and all my friends were those people as well.

Suddenly all that just went away. I'm not asking for any sympathy from anyone here, but when your life changes so radically from literally not having any money at all to almost up until the point when Bullfrog was sold, when that much of your life changes and all of your friends disappear and you suddenly become the vice president of Electronic Arts, that's a lot of changes in your life. And there was a lot of travelling and meetings, and serious talk about contribution margins and costs and budgets, and I wasn't experienced with those things. But actually I learnt a lot from that period.

RG: There was almost a four-year gap between the releases of *Dungeon Keeper* and your first game for Lionhead, *Black & White*. Can you explain what happened during that period?

PM: So what happened was, I left Bullfrog and Electronic Arts on the Friday, in July, and started Lionhead on the Monday. And we kind of started off asking ourselves what sort of game we wanted to make, and eventually we settled with this concept, which was *Black & White*. Like *Populous*, it was the viewpoint that was really the first idea, then the notion of making it a 'god game', then the hand and then having this creature. We started the company up in July and didn't have anything. We didn't have any technology, we didn't have any computers, and everything had to be written from scratch. But what we did have was space booked at E3 in Atlanta. We went over to E3 and I had this little FMV of *Populous* and a notebook. And I started talking to a few journalists about my idea for *Black & White*. And I don't know, it was something about the FMV, something about the way I was saying it, something about the idea, which kind of sparked all these people's imaginations off. We had queues of people wanting to hear about *Black & White*. It was insane. And there was nothing to see; just a 30-second FMV and my notebook, and that was it. And this started this incredible thing that happened with *Black & White*.

It turned into this enormous hype machine that was completely out of our control. I think it was one of the first games to have fan sites, and these fan sites were debating it and talking about it. And because the fan sites were talking about features that people thought were in the game when I showed the game and it didn't have those features, we got accused of over-promise. It was always going to disappoint people. And we definitely did over-promise – there's no doubt about it – but this hype was so much. But there were some amazing things about *Black & White* – the icon-less interface, the hand controlling the whole game, the creature and his learning systems – but the anticipation was so high that people wanted so much for this to be the most amazing experience of all time.



RG: You've been heavily criticised in the past for over-promising features in your games while they're in development and you've been very honest about the mistakes you've made in this respect in the past. What have you learnt from these experiences?

PM: *Fable* was another one of those games which people were very excited about, and it was another which was a little over-hyped, to be honest with you. When I did *Fable* I learnt a real lesson about talking to journalists. There are some rules that you have to give yourself. You can't be a true designer when you're talking to a games journalist, and that's what I was. With *Fable* and with *Black & White* I really was just actually being a designer at this point. Saying, 'Imagine we're going to have this game feature, and it's going to do this and this is why we're going to have it and why it's important.' And, of course, the poor games journalist writes down all these things and it comes across as, 'Oh my god, it's going to be amazing', but really they were just words because a lot of the time with *Fable* and with *Black & White* I was actually talking; I wasn't really demo-ing. So the real big rules now are whenever I talk about a game feature I'm going to show it and be honest about it. And if it is an experiment I'll call it an experiment; I won't call it a game feature. With *Fable II* I think that approach worked better because people were mortally offended by *Black & White* and *Fable*. They really were offended that we over-promised and over-hyped. I'm not a PR person; I'm just a games designer. You're just sitting opposite that roar and enthusiasm of someone who loves writing and making games, and you know, I still believe I'm not a very talented person, but I am passionate.



RG: Tell us how Lionhead differs from Bullfrog, if it does at all.

PM: This time round we're a proper, professionally run company. Gone are the days of shooting work experience people with guns. And what we said this time is, 'Okay, we're part of Microsoft, so what sort of part do we want to be?' And since we want to be fantastic, nice people to do business with, we want to understand what's important to Microsoft and we want to be one of the most professional studios in Microsoft. I think if you say that to yourself, and say that's important, then you don't get the same frustration we did at Bullfrog.

> "I have always been a fan of small teams because it is easy to control the project"

RG: Can you tell us about your new job as creative director at Microsoft Game Studios, and what exactly the role involves?

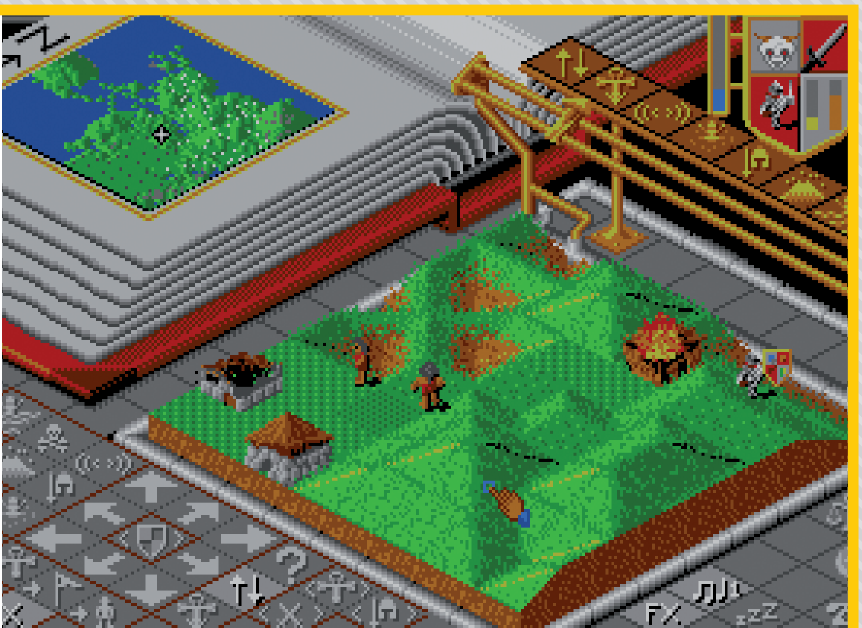
PM: I'm still the head of Lionhead Studios, so I am still talking and thinking and designing and debating and balancing everything that Lionhead does, but now I've got all this new stuff, and I'm someone who loves being busy. The fantastic thing about it is that I can go to companies like Rare – you just think about it, and they defined a lot of the industry. I mean Bullfrog and Lionhead, in total, made about 15 games; Rare have made 150. You don't go there holding a big stick saying, 'This is how you do things'; you just learn more than you teach. But I think just having someone from outside sitting there with these amazing people and asking, 'What's important in what you're doing? What's important for you as a team? What's important for the people playing the games? What's important for the future?' is actually quite useful. The second thing is that when you've got someone who is creative, helping people see a direction for us all to go down, I think it raises the overall quality of things. The third thing is that a lot of this industry has been obsessed about sharing code, and what they really mean is sharing engine tech; sharing ideas, and having common ideas and saying, 'Look at this little pot of gold here that no one's really exploited before, so why don't we all dip into that one pot of gold?' Finally, I have to ensure, creatively, that people in Redmond [Washington, Microsoft's headquarters], 5,000 miles away, deeply understand what is going on in Europe. What games are being done, why they're being done and what's exciting about those games, because that distance is a really big barrier. So that is a lot of what my role is. And it's been pretty exciting so far, and I've seen some pretty amazing things, which I can't tell you about, of course.

RG: Do you still get time to play a lot of games, and are there any that you've enjoyed recently?

PM: Well I've been playing a bit of *Wii Sports Resort*, which is pretty good – I like the table tennis in that. I've also been playing quite a lot of *Garry's Mod* on *Half-Life 2*, because my son is obsessed with it. I think the *Half-Life* series is, for me, probably some of the best games there are; I really do. The trouble is, my son is obsessed with Valve games and we can't play *Left 4 Dead* because he's just too young. He wants to, but we can't play that – I get in a lot of trouble for letting him play *Half-Life 2*.

RG: Would you like him to follow in your footsteps?

PM: I'd love him to experience some of the things I've experienced, which is just the joy and wonder of doing something impossibly hard and making something that's never existed before.



>> [Amiga] *Populous* was Peter's first hit. It certainly wouldn't be his last.



>> [Amiga] *Theme Park*: all the fun of the fair, including its management.



YOU ASK THE QUESTIONS

We were inundated with questions for Peter and he kindly visited our forum to answer those we didn't have time to ask. Check online if yours isn't here

Now that you are a full-time producer, do you miss programming and is it something you think you'll go back to some day?
I'll never not miss it. I have to resist the temptation of coding every day, and I do miss it so much.

Can you explain what happened to the planned Dreamcast version of *Black & White*?
Well at that time there were lots of formats and lots of times when *Black & White* was going to be converted to everything from the PlayStation to this weird machine that Hasbro were making, and I think what happened was that it took quite a long time to convert and we hadn't got far enough along before people started withdrawing from the Dreamcast.

Which of your games would you most like to remake and why?

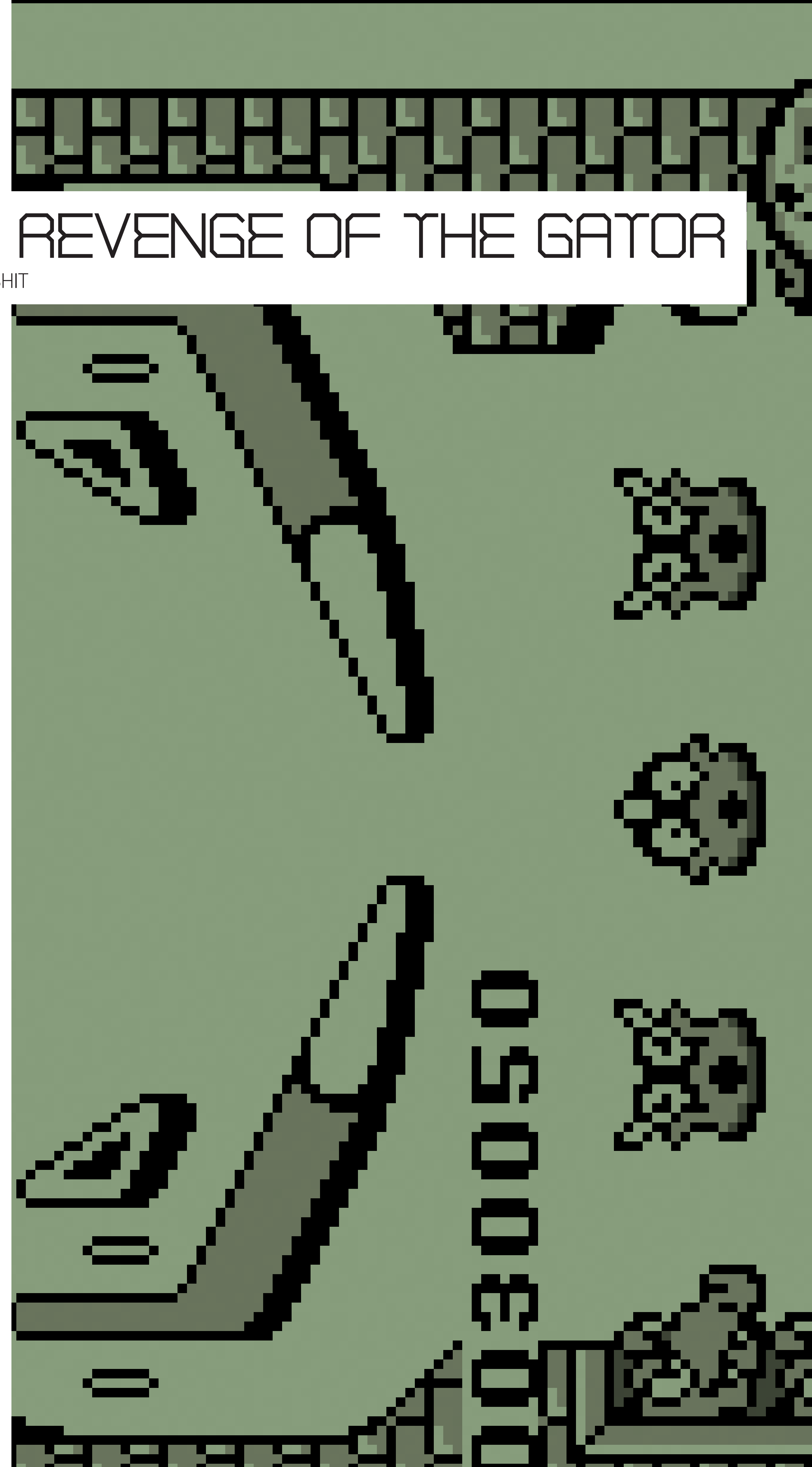
Well, *Syndicate* would be pretty cool. I think setting this game inside this simulated city and allowing there to be collateral damage was interesting. I think I wouldn't mind having another stab at *Black & White*, bizarrely, and I wouldn't mind having another stab at *Populous*. I think *Populous* probably would be the one that would be the most amazing to do a sequel for.



Do you think the current fascination with the FPS genre will give way to more intelligent gaming?
What's so good about that genre is that it's quite easy to get the drama across because an awful lot of them are on rails. Have we seen the end of the inventions in that genre? No, I don't think we have. I think it was kind of defined by *Doom*, redefined by *Halo*, and I'm sure there's going to be another redefinition along the way.

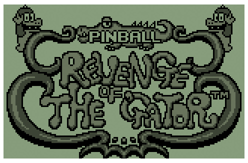
How do you see the industry has changed over the past 20 years?
Well, bizarrely, despite going from selling games on trestle tables to it being bigger than the movie industry, you're seeing a great many more independent game developers shooting up, and they're just like we were in the Bullfrog days. The people who did *Castle Crashers* and *Braid*, they are the Bullfrogs of today. And I don't think their world is any different to mine.

Finally, can you tell us something that you've never told anyone before?
Well, I probably already have during this interview. I'm a really bad driver; I crash a lot of cars.



PINBALL: REVENGE OF THE GATOR

FAR FROM A CROCK OF OLD SHIT



- **PUBLISHER:** HAL LABORATORY
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** PINBALL
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** GAME BOY
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+



HISTORY

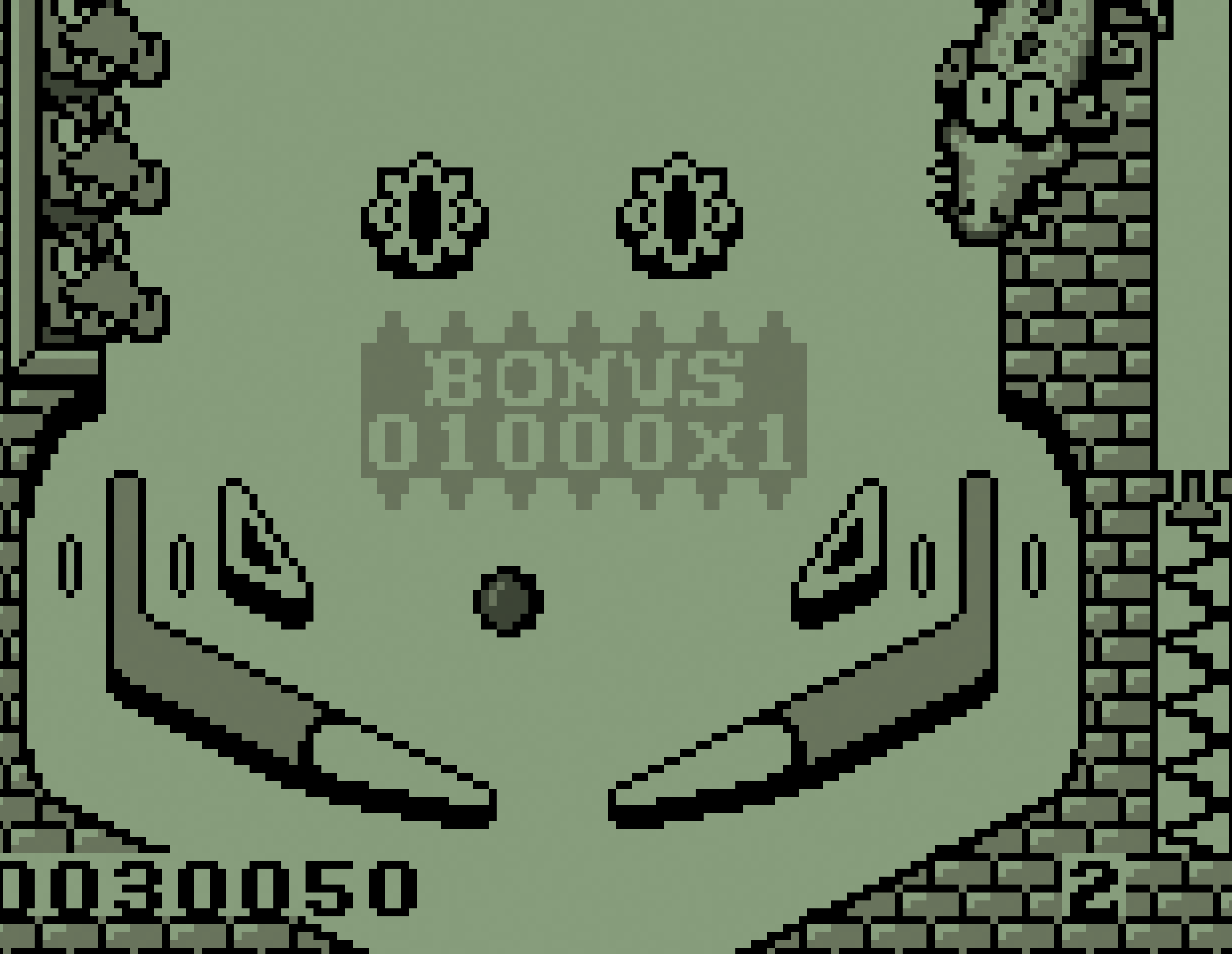
***Pokémon Pinball* gets plenty of kudos on the Game Boy – we've championed it ourselves – so we thought we'd bring a far more obscure release to your attention.**

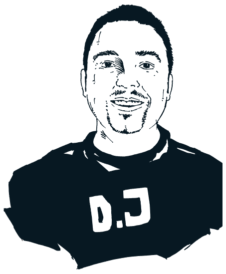
Now a venerable 20 years old, Hal Laboratory's *Revenge Of The Gator* may feel a little long in the tooth, but it still manages to play a perfectly entertaining game of pinball. This, in part, is thanks to the beautifully designed main table that's an absolute joy to navigate and explore. Yes, it lacks the insane number of bells and whistles that can be found on later Game Boy pinball games, but clever design ensures that you'll constantly return to this cracking release to best your high score.

Of course, Hal is no stranger to making pinball games, so it should come as no surprise to learn that *Gator* has a number of bonuses to discover as you battle across the main three-screen-high table, including a fair smattering of off-shoot bonus boards that enable you to do everything from knock a croc off its perch by bashing away at blocks, to taking down smaller heads whack-a-mole-style as they keep popping up.

The longevity of this excellent game is further extended by a superb multiplayer mode that pits two players directly against each other and sees them trying to reduce each other's score to zero. It's a concept that works brilliantly, and it's a shame that this challenging and enjoyable mode hasn't been revisited in more recent digital pinball releases, especially as we no longer have a second cart to exploit the original.

The designers of *Pinball: Revenge Of The Gator* proved that you don't need flashy visuals – although the cute crocs are certainly charming – multiple levels and over-the-top features in order to make a perfectly good pinball game. You just need a tight, focused design, plenty of imagination, and to not be afraid to go against the grain. *Gator* has all this and more, meaning that it should be right at the top of your Game Boy list.


BONUS
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2



» The biggest surprise this month is WayForward's excellent re-imagining of A Boy And His Blob. Other delights include the return of Mario & Sonic and the slick PSP version of GTA: Chinatown Wars. Enjoy.

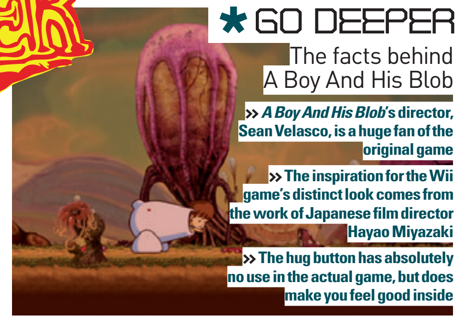
» A BOY AND HIS BLOB



» [Wii] *Blob's* visuals are absolutely sensational. It's like a cartoon come to life.

retro GAMER SIZZLER

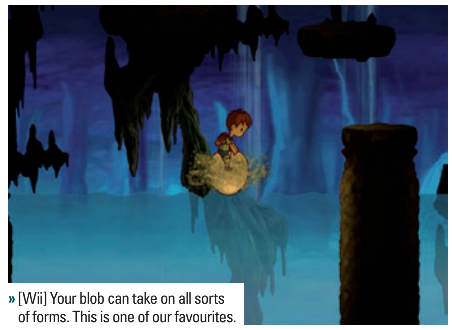
✱ GO DEEPER
The facts behind A Boy And His Blob



» *A Boy And His Blob's* director, Sean Velasco, is a huge fan of the original game

» The inspiration for the Wii game's distinct look comes from the work of Japanese film director Hayao Miyazaki

» The hug button has absolutely no use in the actual game, but does make you feel good inside



» [Wii] Your blob can take on all sorts of forms. This is one of our favourites.

A Boy And His Blob

WAYFORWARD DOES IT AGAIN

INFORMATION

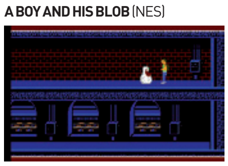
» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99
» **PUBLISHER:** MAJESCO
» **DEVELOPER:** WAYFORWARD
» **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

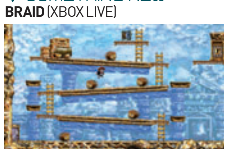
» *A Boy And His Blob* was created by Activision co-founder David Crane and first appeared on the NES in 1989. A sequel appeared a year later on the Game Boy but later games for both the GBA and DS were cancelled. The DS version was actually created by David Crane's very own Skywards Technologies.

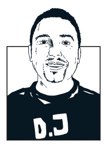
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▽ SOMETHING OLD
A BOY AND HIS BLOB (NES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
BRAID (XBOX LIVE)





After spending years making games based on popular films and TV shows, WayForward Technologies has finally found its true calling in life – revitalising classic retro franchises. *A Boy And His Blob* is quite simply one of the finest reboots we've played and has been created with a level of skill and love that similar games can only dream of. From its gorgeous visuals to its wondrously clever blending of platforming and puzzles, *A Boy And His Blob* rarely puts a foot wrong.

This is mainly because WayForward knows the original game inside and out and, as a result, has managed to stay true to its spirit, while adding plenty of new tricks to the old formula. The end result is a game that actually betters the title it's based on. And let's be honest, for all the inventiveness and originality that the NES game boasted, Crane's clever game was hampered by clunky controls and an incredibly tough difficulty.

This has all been rectified for this stunning Wii-make, and while it's perhaps a little too easy initially, its structure and responsive controls really help to expand David Crane's extremely clever concept. Worlds are handily split into ten shorter stages, you have unlimited access to jelly beans, and it's possible to change the trajectory of thrown beans. Longevity is also ensured thanks to three deviously hidden chests that are scattered around each stage. Unlock them and you'll gain access to even more levels that are far tougher to complete. There are even some impressive boss battles, although they'll require far more thought than traditional encounters.

For all its new tricks, you'll mainly be in awe of *A Boy And His Blob's* ethereal beauty and the many clever forms that the lovable blob can morph into. Some may feel that only having a limited number of forms on each level stunts your freedom of experimentation, but that's not the case at all. *A Boy And His Blob* is a wonderful little game that no Wii owner should be without.

OPINION



After being blown away by *Contra 4* I was pleasantly surprised to discover that *A Boy And His Blob* is a brilliant piece of work. Glorious to look at and with carefully structured gameplay, it's an absolute gem of a game, whether you've played the NES original or not.

Stuart Hunt

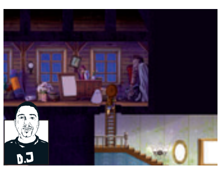
In a nutshell

It's a little easy, but WayForward has crafted a clever, beautiful game that easily surpasses the NES original. An essential Wii purchase and a brilliant blending of genres.

» Scores

Presentation	94%
Graphics	96%
Sound	88%
Playability	92%
Addictivity	88%
Overall	**91%**

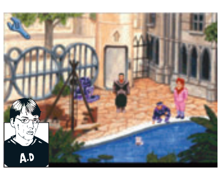
✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
A Boy And His Blob
Now I can hug that lovable tyke whenever I want. Excellent stuff.



STUART
GTA: Chinatown Wars
Chinatown Wars is simply the best portable iteration of *GTA* to date.



ASHLEY
Beneath A Steel Sky: Remastered
The touch controls are the finest I've seen on the iPhone.

Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars

SO GOOD THEY RELEASED IT TWICE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSP » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** DS » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ROCKSTAR GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** ROCKSTAR LEEDS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



It seems only yesterday we were singing Rockstar's praises for its excellent cel-shaded DS iteration of *GTA*. If you missed the review, or require a quick recap, Rockstar gave us an inventive, immersive and well-crafted portable *GTA* episode that retained the 3D series' signature brand of divisive gameplay and humour, but played things decidedly closer in look to the early DMA days of the series.

This recent PSP release is essentially the same game as the DS version but shines more in some areas than others. Basically it comes down to individual taste. If you happen to own both handhelds and are losing sleep over which version to purchase, though, here's a summation of the difference.

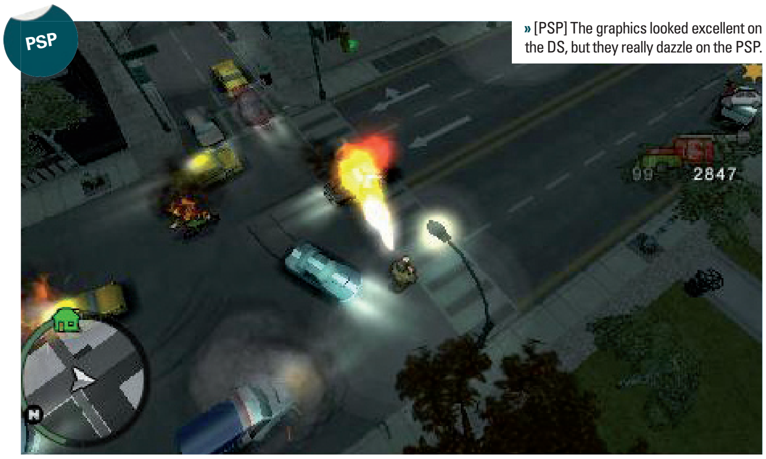
The visuals, screen size and sound get a big tick in the box marked 'PSP', but the lack of a second screen, which was used in the Nintendo version to handily flash up useful things like antihero Huang Lee's GPS, awards a big yellow smiley face to Team DS. Also, the quirky mini-game sections that made such inventive use of the DS touch-screen controls feel less impressive using PSP buttons and analogue rubs. And the PSP version boasts a few extra missions, but its multiplayer only supports up to two players whereas the DS version supports four.

Like we said, it basically comes down to personal preference. And it's meaningless anyway, as both versions are resplendent and must-buys for their respective machines.

» Scores

Presentation	94%
Graphics	93%
Sound	90%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	94%
Overall	**93%**

PSP



» [PSP] The graphics looked excellent on the DS, but they really dazzle on the PSP.



OPINION



While the mini-games aren't as slick, the graphics are highly polished and are a massive improvement over the DS original. A proper 3D game would have been nice, but fans of the original *GTA* games will be very happy with *Chinatown Wars*.

Darran Jones

PSP



LittleBigPlanet

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £24.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Game creators and** level editors were all the rage once upon a time, so it's pleasing to see that this PSP version of Sony's PS3 hit feels so charmingly old-fashioned in its execution. The main levels lack imagination compared to the created ones, but that was always the problem with the original. Ignore that and you'll discover a charming platformer that just keeps on giving.

» Score **89%**

iPhone



Puzzle Bobble

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 2

» **Let's face it:** it's a given that *Puzzle Bobble* would find its way to Apple's portable. If it didn't, it's probable our world would tilt violently on its axis and cats would start sleeping with dogs, or something equally as unnerving. Anyway, this is a pretty phoned-in (sorry) port hampered by some uninspired backgrounds and annoyingly twitchy – or sluggish, if you're playing in tap mode – touch/motion controls.

» Score **65%**

iPhone



Command & Conquer: Red Alert

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £5.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **As we suspected,** this iteration of *Red Alert* keeps things simple. The interface and touch-screen controls feel straightforward, and the gameplay and missions feel cut down against the deep and epic skirmishes that the series is renowned for. We were also left cold by the lack of value that its hefty £6 asking price offers.

» Score **69%**

XBLA



Ion Assault

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **What a surprise.** There's yet another twin-stick shooter on Xbox Live Arcade. While it's no *Geometry Wars*, CorePlay's new game at least adds a new twist to the genre, by allowing you to soak up ions and then use them to shield your ship and power its weapons. It's a lovely little touch that adds a thin layer of strategy to what is otherwise a fairly simple blaster. Worth a look if you love your shmups.

» Score **73%**

RETRORATED

>> HOLY INVASION OF PRIVACY, BADMAN! WHAT DID I DO TO DESERVE THIS?

Holy Invasion Of Privacy, Badman! What Did I Do To Deserve This?

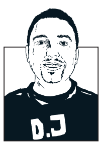
LONG-WINDED NAME, GREAT GAME

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PSP » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £24.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NIS AMERICA » **DEVELOPER:** ACQUIRE » **PLAYERS:** 1

PSP



» [PSP] That little purple dude needs to be protected at all costs. Hide him carefully.



The easiest way to sum up Acquire's quirky little PSP game is to call it a 2D take on Bullfrog's *Dungeon Keeper*. That's an unfair summation, however, as *Holy Invasion Of Privacy, Badman!* is full of its own ideas and manages to stand apart from the classic PC game.

Taking control of a pick, you must dig out a maze to house an eclectic array of enemies. Blocks contain various traces of nutrients and mana, which in turn decide what creatures will appear when you break them open. While simple slimes are relatively weak, they move nutrients around your dungeon so that you may produce more of the little buggers and populate new corridors. Add in a complex food chain and things get difficult very, very quickly.

After a set amount of time, adventurers will invade your dank little dungeon and you must find a



safe place to hide your dungeon overlord. If it gets captured it's game over, so make sure that wherever you place him is well populated.

Once the invading adventurers have been defeated, your remaining dig power – used to mark out your dungeon – can be applied to strengthen your monsters. It's a simple concept, to be sure, but it works brilliantly thanks to some excellent 2D visuals, a truly fantastic localisation and a variety of sly digs at the tropes of Japanese RPGs. Yes, it's tough, especially once you hit level 5, but it's also insanely addictive. Excellent fun.

OPINION



I haven't been able to put down this quirky little PSP game since picking it up. The concept may be simple, but scratch beneath the surface and you'll find an engrossing and addictive puzzle game. If you like original, challenging but ultimately rewarding games, *Badman* is a must-buy.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	75%
Sound	65%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	92%

Overall 88%

Wii



» [Wii] You'd think there was an entertaining way of milking cows on the Wii. You'd be wrong.

Harvest Moon: Tree Of Tranquility

A FRANCHISE THAT NEEDS PLENTY OF HELP

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO » **DEVELOPER:** MARVELOUS » **PLAYERS:** 1



Despite starting life on the SNES, *Harvest Moon* has always worked best on handhelds. Maybe it's the way you can simply dip in and out of farming life, but the later home versions never held the same joy as their DS and GBA cousins. Sadly, Marvelous Interactive's latest addition to the 13-year-old series is once again a missed opportunity that offers very little over previous GameCube outings.

The biggest issue here is that Marvelous has done absolutely nothing to capture the feel of working on a farm with the Wii's unique controls. We can forgive the lack of MotionPlus, but surely a game like *Harvest Moon* should be brilliant with the Remote? Unfortunately, Marvelous doesn't think so and the end results are dull, samey controls that are far better simulated by simply using traditional button presses.

Even without the woeful controls, this latest *Harvest Moon* manages to



disappoint, mainly because it feels like such a chore to play. Now we know that the whole game is based around doing chores, but they used to be fun and entertaining once upon a time. Not any more, though. You quickly get bogged down with your jobs, and so many new additions have been added that the game feels like a bloated, horrible mess.

Hardcore fans will get some enjoyment, but even they'll admit that this is a franchise that's in desperate need of a serious makeover. What a pity.

OPINION



It pains me to say it, but the *Harvest Moon* series needs a massive overhaul. Like now. Lazy and uninspired, the series has really lost its way and it would appear that so have the developers. You'd be better off sticking with the original SNES offering or the great GBA version.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

Presentation	50%
Graphics	64%
Sound	72%
Playability	62%
Addictivity	58%

Overall 58%

Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Winter Games

A PLUMBER AND A HEDGEHOG GO TO VANCOUVER...

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** Wii » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



While kiddiewinks will lap this up like sherbet-flavoured kittens, its likely that more mature gamers will probably struggle to find enough here to really hold their interest in the latest *Mario & Sonic*.

We can't fault Sega for effort, though. It's crammed this portable marriage, which contains more licences than you can shake a curling brush at, with plenty of events split between 'winter' and the wackier 'dream' events, and also a 'Party Games' section that offers a refreshing take on the main events played through the perspective of bingo, *Wheel Of Fortune* or concentration. And that's not all: you also get the all-new Adventure Tours; an admittedly by-the-numbers RPG-style game permeated with missions that take the form of truncated versions of the main sporting events.

Perhaps the reason why the game struggled to hold our interest is down to its plodding pace, and the sometimes befuddling controls. Most of the events require a combination of three different actions, and some even employ a cumbersome mixture of D-pad controls and stylus inputs and motions, which means it's recommended you play the game with your stylus wand stashed behind your ear for ease of reach and an empty brain ready to cache all the button inputs and stylus swipes required to walk away with a coloured medal.

That said, if you're a fan of the original game, you're sure to find much to like in this sequel. And it's certainly the perfect game to put a smile on your face over those bleak winter months.

» Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	75%
Sound	70%
Playability	75%
Addictivity	68%
Overall	**72%**

DS

» [DS] The Adventure Tours mode is a quirky *Zelda*-style adventure game. It only lasts a few hours but is a welcome addition to the pack.





OPINION



Although this is a big improvement over the DS version of *Olympic Games*, it's not quite up to the same standard as *Winter Games* on the Wii. More focused events and better stylus controls could have turned this into a gold medallist. Shame.

Darran Jones

iPhone



Q*bert Deluxe

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** 59 PENCE » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Surprisingly solid update** of the arcade original that boasts slick, accurate swipe controls, a selection of well-designed levels and the option of playing either the original game or a brand new enhanced version. Aside from new online scoreboards, this is still *Q*bert*, and it remains just as frustrating and addictive as it did all those years ago. Now let's have some more arcade classics.

» Score **77%**

PSN



Tank Battles

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £5.29 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Originally a mobile** phone game, Gameloft has now translated *Tank Battles* to the PlayStation Network. Sadly, despite some gorgeous presentation, this new take on *Combat* is a little too messy to be fun. The controls mean you constantly get stuck on objects, making it far too easy to get shot by opponent tanks. It's fun in multiplayer mode, but you'd be better off with *Bomberman Ultra* instead.

» Score **63%**

XBLA



Zombie Apocalypse

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Wow, another twin-stick** shooter on Xbox Live Arcade. How many does that make now? Cynicism aside, this is a fairly fun arcade blaster that's let down by its lengthy levels and wimpish weapons. Effectively *Robotron* with zombies, the ability to use the environments to take out the undead is a nice touch and there's plenty of humour on offer, but it gets tiring all too quickly.

» Score **60%**

iPhone

retro GAMER SIZZLER



Beneath A Steel Sky: Remastered

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Compared to *Monkey Island***, this is a simple update, with only a hint system and glorious new cut-scenes. On the other hand, you could argue that *BASS* doesn't need anything extra, as it remains a superb adventure. It also works beautifully on the iPhone thanks to a slick interface that makes playing it a breeze. An essential download.

» Score **90%**

» TOMB RAIDER: THE GREATEST RAIDS

INFORMATION

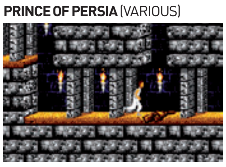
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £14.99 - £19.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC/EIDOS
- » **DEVELOPER:** CORE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Tomb Raider* is notable for bringing the most successful female videogame star ever, Lara Croft, to the world. Since her debut in 1995, Lara became a media icon. The series is made up of nine main games – the first six were developed by Core Design and the last three were handled by Crystal Dynamics.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
PRINCE OF PERSIA (VARIOUS)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES (PS3)



★ GO DEEPER

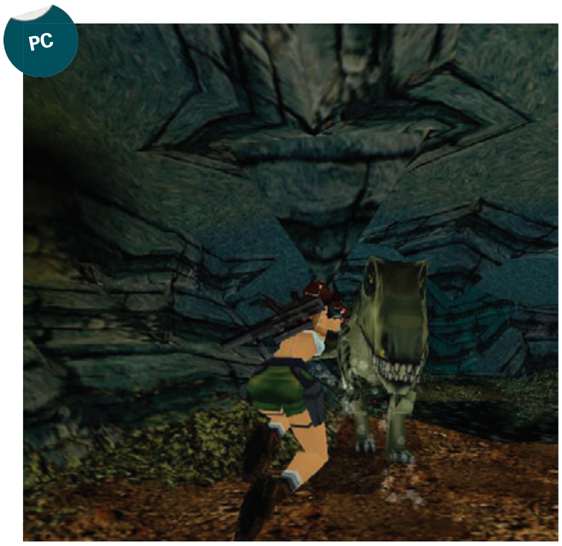
The facts behind Tomb Raider: The Greatest Raids

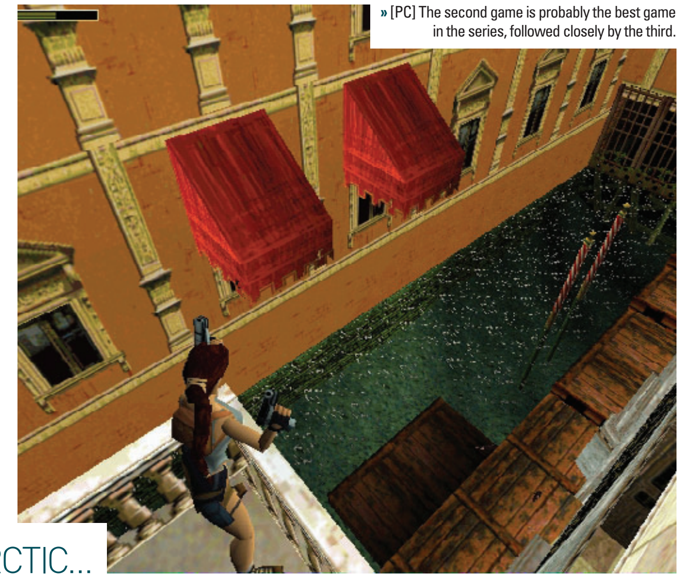
» **Lara Croft's butler is named Winston.**

» **The *Tomb Raider* series has sold more than 30 million games.**

» **Originally developed by Core Design in 1995, the reins of the franchise were handed over to Crystal Dynamics for *Tomb Raider: Legend* in 2006.**

PC





» [PC] The second game is probably the best game in the series, followed closely by the third.

RAID OVER MOSCOW, CHINA, THE ARCTIC…

Tomb Raider: The Greatest Raids



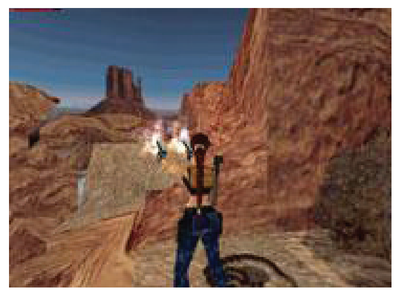
It seems funny to think that back in 1995 men got unequivocally hot and bothered over Lara Croft. Having returned to her early games this month to write this review, we reckon that you'll probably find more sex appeal from a six-foot Coke bottle wearing a bikini than those early models of Eidos's first lady.

That didn't stop her from swinging into many gamers' hearts and minds, though, whether she was appearing on the cover of *The Face*, getting perpetually imitated by a slew of models and actresses, getting her own pair of rubbish movies, and eventually earning entry into the *Guinness Book Of World Records* for being the most successful female videogame character of all time by selling about a squillion games.

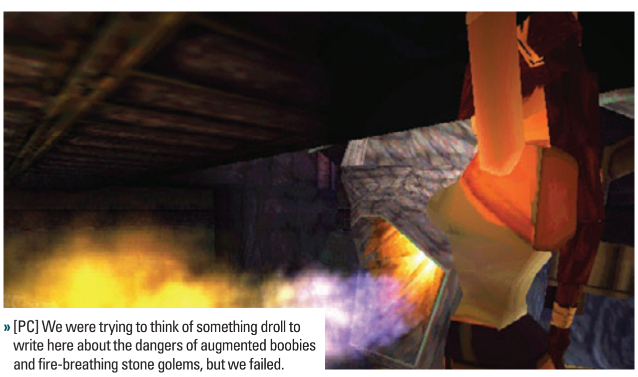
What we have here is a collection of the first four games in the *Tomb Raider* series. And as they vary from good to very good, and you can pick up the compilation for the charitable sum of £14.99, we've cleverly deduced that this pack holds a lot of value, even if the games are starting to look a little like ancient artefacts themselves these days.

Released at the fringe of the 3D polygonal boom, the original *Tomb Raider* adventure certainly looks the most ropey, but the gameplay and adventure still retain a classic sense of adventure. The excellent *Tomb Raider II* and its sequel are easily the best on the pack – if only for the cool tutorial sections that allow you to terrorize Croft's dithering butler by trapping him in a freezer like a tub of psychopathic vanilla ice cream. And while the fourth game, *The Last Revelation*, isn't as tightly designed as previous games in the series, as it finds you jet-setting around the globe on a disjointed-feeling adventure, it still proves an enjoyable addition to the pack.

We reckon this quartet of some of the best action-adventure games ever made is a great deal, and the games still haven't lost their appeal. There are plenty of epic moments just waiting to be rediscovered.



» [PC] *Tomb Raider 3* takes Lara all around the globe, including the Nevada desert… but sadly not Sin City.



» [PC] We were trying to think of something droll to write here about the dangers of augmented boobies and fire-breathing stone golems, but we failed.

In a nutshell

It's difficult not to recommend, really. If you have a few quid burning a few holes down the back of your sofa, and bags of free time on your hands, you could do a lot worse than pick this up.

OPINION



It's easy to laugh at Lara's pointy boobs now, but there's no denying that the first three *Tomb Raider* games remain excellent gaming experiences. Yes, they look a little rough around the edges now, but the gameplay and sense of exploring huge locations is still perfectly handled. Highly recommended.

Darran Jones

» Scores

Presentation	65%
Graphics	67%
Sound	85%
Playability	80%
Addictivity	80%
Overall	**80%**

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews



Well, it's freezing outside, and that's a good excuse to stay in and work on new homebrew games, which many programmers can't resist. Don't we love 'em for it, because this month they've given us the chance to play as explorers, spacemen, cowboys, rats and drunk! It's like the office Christmas party, only without the embarrassing photocopies the next morning.



» [C64] Do not forsake me, oh my darling.





» [C64] How they run when they hear this fellow's gun.

» [C64] Can't we play Snap instead?



NOT THE SAME AS THE MUNCH BUNCH, APPARENTLY

THE WILD BUNCH



FORMAT: COMMODORE 64
DEVELOPED BY: JON WELLS
LINK: WWW.PSYTRONIK.COM
RELEASE DATE: 2009
PRICE: £4.99 (CASSETTE), £8.99 (BUDGET DISK) OR £12.99 (PREMIUM DISK)
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

Yee-haw, pardner! It be a time for some high falootin', rootin', tootin' gaming action way out West as a lone cowboy. Wronged by those low-life varmints, the Wild Bunch goes lookin' for justice… no wait, hang on a minute. This ridiculous voice is getting painful and we nearly shot the dog waving a six shooter around for effect. Can we start again?

Stereotypes aside, *The Wild Bunch* on the Spectrum was put out in the Eighties by budget house Firebird and a few years after that initial release, Jon Wells, then a novice programmer, felt it was a shame that other owners of his favoured platform didn't get to enjoy some ten-gallon action. Although he started a conversion, Jon unexpectedly found himself in gainful employment writing C64 games and the floppies were left gathering dust at the back of a storage box for a couple of decades until he was finally worn down by the accusing looks that they kept giving him and picked *The Wild Bunch* up to finish it off.

The story revolves around a lonesome stranger who witnesses a murder committed by the infamous Wild Bunch gang, only to be wrongly accused of being the killer himself by the authorities and forced to go on the run. With his dying breath, the victim described his killer, and so the cowboy's primary objective is to see to it that said murderer is brought to justice and his own name cleared before he is captured by a pursuing Pinkerton agent. To achieve that goal, it's necessary for the cowboy to travel between towns, making money to finance his quest by playing poker with the local gambler or taking hoodlums in to the sheriff dead or alive, and that cash can be exchanged for supplies for further journeys, drinks in the saloon to increase health levels, and bribes to the local telegraph operator to see what the day's wires say about activity in other towns and the current location of the Pinkerton agent.

Like the original, this Commodore 64 conversion is a somewhat mixed bag with regard to the way everything is presented; the text-based action for the majority of events such as the journeys between towns or visiting the store to stock up on provisions stands out next to the graphics of the map screen, wanted posters and overhauled background of the shootout sequence in a way that feels slightly jarring, the latter even more so for the sudden switch to relying on fast reactions. But despite that strange flipping back and forth between styles, *The Wild Bunch* proves to be remarkably engrossing and, since a single shot in a gunfight or not sufficiently planning a journey is fatal, there are some moments of real tension throughout. It isn't perfect and some of the mostly cosmetic issues could possibly have been addressed with a little more work, but more strategic titles like this are few and far between on the C64, so this will hopefully entertain players who like their gunplay to come with a large side order of number crunching and poker. Yippee ki yay, li'l doggie and so forth…

87%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

ROBOTRON: 6128

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** LACHLAN KEOWN
» **DOWNLOAD:** MAMEEMU.COM/ROBOTRON/INDEX.HTM » **PRICE:** FREE

The original *Robotron: 2084* really shouldn't require an introduction, and that's good because we've been struggling to come up with something that didn't just state the obvious! *Robotron: 6128* is a rather fabulously titled attempt at shoehorning that claustrophobic blasting experience into the Amstrad.

From a programming perspective, good implementations of *Robotron* are uncommon, and this version really isn't perfect. Most of the issues stem from how sprites are rendered because, along with quite a bit of flicker, each sprite has a blank area around it that overlaps others, and this means that nasties can occasionally be hidden under each other and the collectable family members.

It's a shame, because *Robotron: 6128* looks and sounds the part, emulates the control of the original, and otherwise plays okay, but by taking a busy game and making things even harder to follow, it pushes the difficulty curve too far.

63%





» [Amstrad CPC] The graphics are certainly authentic.





» [Spectrum] Remember to drink responsibly.

HOMEBREW

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YLZYYAX » **PRICE:** FREE

Making homebrew beer is a brilliant way to save a few pennies, and, having been extensively tutored by Jonathan Cauldwell's latest Spectrum release *Homebrew*, we now feel suitably informed to offer readers a quick guide to this process. It's pretty simple, apparently: just get hold of a large bottle called a demi-john, collect a selection of fruit by shooting at oversized insects and mammals as they're flying past – but avoid touching them – and drop the latter into the former and hey presto! Makes perfect sense, really, doesn't it?

With the sound limited to beeper-generated spot effects this may be a little quiet, but the graphics, produced by Jarrod Bentley, who drew the Spectrum version of *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, are detailed and colourful, and as a package, *Homebrew* would happily have slotted into Ultimate's catalogue back in the early Eighties, sharing the same mixture of bizarre cuteness and no-nonsense, addictive action of titles like *Cookie* or *Pssst*.

86%

SUPER COBRA

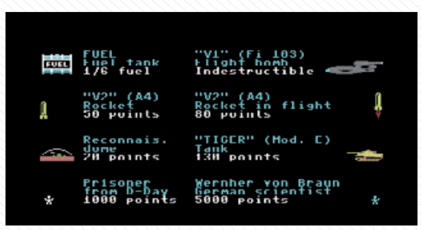
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

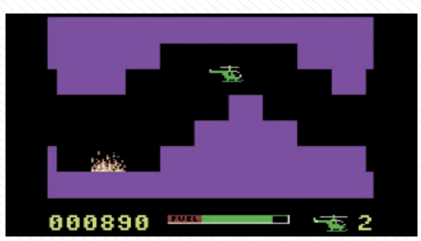
» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** JÖRG 'DATALAND' HEYLTJES
» **DOWNLOAD:** NONAME.C64.ORG/CSDB/RELEASE/?ID=81987 » **PRICE:** FREE

The Super Cobra is an advanced helicopter gunship, state of the art World War II hardware piloted by the Allies' finest. Its mission is to fly behind the lines of Nazi Germany, kidnap Wernher von Braun and make a dash to safety… and yes, that's the actual plot that German developer Jörg Heyltjes wrote for it!

Anachronistic plotlines aside, rather than basing it on the arcade version, *Super Cobra* follows the lead of the conversion released on the Philips Videopac and, although details like fuel tankers and the chopper itself have been redesigned, the landscape has been left as just solid blocks of colour. The action is straight, unadulterated blasting, but the difficulty level is truly severe – there are cheat options on the title screen, thankfully – so this is one for hardcore *Scramble* fans and masochists. We found it quite enjoyable, but the majority of gamers may well struggle.

53%

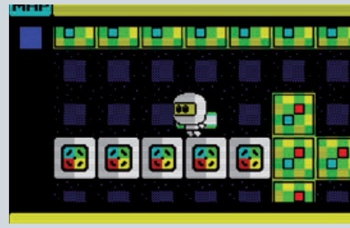




» [C64] Maybe it was a right at the services?

WHAT'S BREWING?

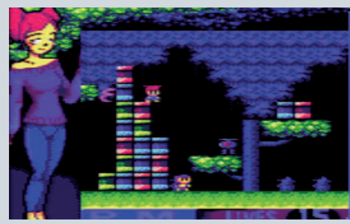
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Spectrum] My god, it's full of colours!

The left ear

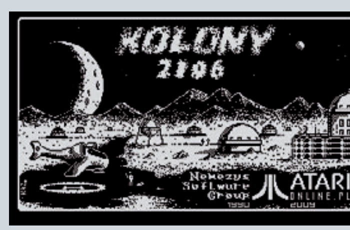
Rob Pearmain, the author of Cronosoft's recently released *Bip Boi* on the Spectrum, already has another new game in development. Described as a platform collect-'em-up, *Wingman* appears to be coming along rather nicely if the early preview and screen grab posted over at the World of Spectrum forums by the author are anything to go by, and it should at least be worth checking out further when it's completed.



» [Amstrad CPC] More cuteness from the Mojons.

The right ear

CPC developer Mojon Twins has been incredibly busy lately, and its most recent release is *Platformer Medley Block 1* on the Amstrad CPC, another spot of almost worryingly cute platform action but with an interesting extra twist: the story is episodic and, when *Block 1* is completed, a code is released. When this is emailed to the developer, the second block will be made available. Have a look at the website at **www.mojontwins.com** for more information.



The final front ear

The Atari 8-bit has a fine history when it comes to space-bound trading and strategy titles, and the seminal *M.U.L.E.* is probably the first stop for most players. So newcomer *Kolony 2106* has a lot to live up to, all things considered, but it certainly looks the part so far. Would-be colony operators must mine the planet, trade with neighbouring colonies and research new technologies to build their assets up.

HOMEBREW

» The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

» Manic Miner

The people behind the excellent *Warhawk DS* have recently completed their next project, *Manic Miner: The Lost Levels*, also for the Nintendo DS. Based on Stuart Campbell's **Retro Gamer** article, the game collects 20 of the extra levels added to conversions of *Manic Miner* over the years into one place, gives everything a visual sprucing up and adds ten more specially created stages with movie themes. There will be a proper look at Miner Willy's latest spot of spelunking next issue, but for the impatient there's always the website over at **headsoft.com.au/index.php?category=mmll**



» [Nintendo DS] New places for Willy to discover.

» Jet Set Willy

JSJSW is a new version of *Jet Set Willy Online*, the multiplayer online remake of Matthew Smith's classic. That wouldn't be interesting on its own, but the twist is that *JSJSW* doesn't require a dedicated client and instead runs in a browser window. It probably won't connect to existing *Jet Set Willy Online* servers but, since Windows, Mac or Linux users can join in, there should still be lots of Willys around.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on Retro Gamer's Flash game of the month. This month we look at *Small Worlds*.

THE SMALL WORLDS ARE SILENT. Nothing nasty is lurking in the darkness and the player merely needs to explore, locate power sources and return to their escape craft. The screen starts out in close up, but as each world is explored, the camera zooms out to show the whole.

jayisgames.com/cgdc6/?gameID=9

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...



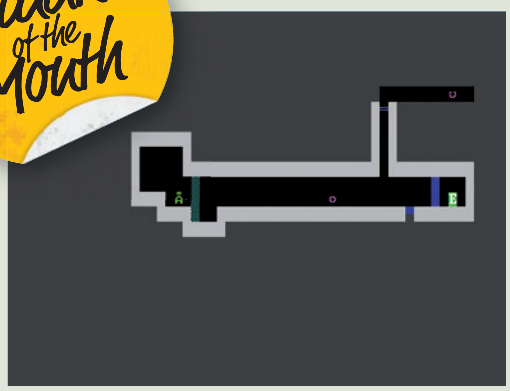
MOUSE NO. PROBABLY A RAT



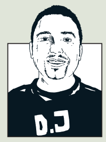
» **DOWNLOAD:** TINYURL.COM/YEP6ENY

Bob Fearon's *Squid Yes! Not So Octopus!* is pointed at squarely by programmer David Scatliffe as his muse for *Mouse No. Probably A Rat*, and there are many similarities: combat takes place within a single-screen arena, assailants materialise to menace the player on a regular basis, and one touch from anything ends the game.

Up until there it sounds fine, if somewhat harsh on a single life, but *MNPAR* goes on to take its cues from the *Squid*'s controls. Bullets are fired from the front of the sprite, so aiming at something involves pretty much fighting the inertia to run headlong at it, and lining up shots while staying safe proves frustrating, so unfortunately this isn't a contender for the crown…



STAR GUARD

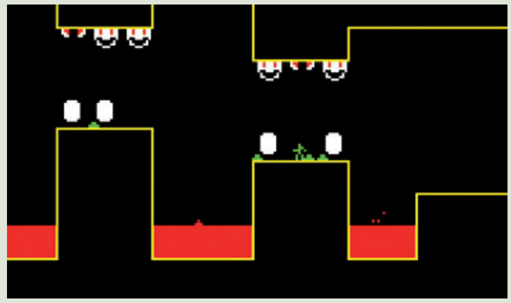


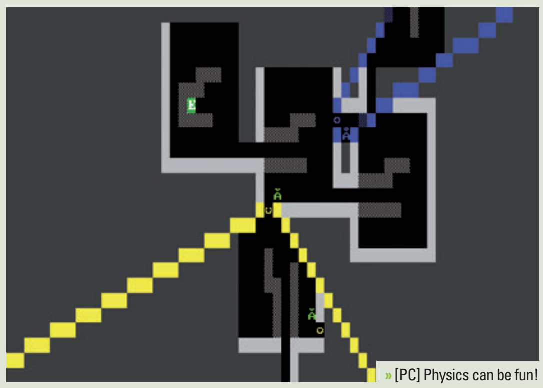
» **DOWNLOAD:** VACUUMFLOWERS.COM/STAR_GUARD/STAR_GUARD.HTML

The Star Guard have been sent into the Wizard's heavily defended castle, but only one member of this crack squad remains for a player to guide through large, chunkily rendered levels, blasting away at all manner of hell-spawned hazards. As the game progresses, captions appear, offering supposition as to the Wizard's origins, although no mention of a certain Nintendo film is made.

Although a tally of deaths within a stage is kept, the player can't actually run out of lives in normal mode and the mission can be completed with some skill and sheer perseverance; hard mode is unlocked as a reward, adding a lives counter and, for those brave enough to have a second go, highlighting just how difficult the later stages actually are.

Remake of the Mouth





» [PC] Physics can be fun!

ASCIIPORTAL

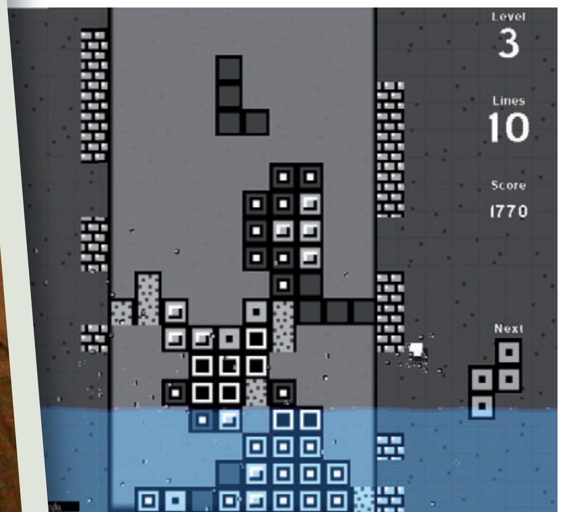


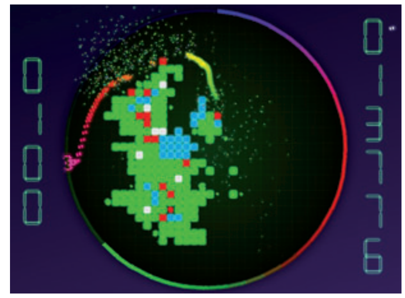
» **DOWNLOAD:** CYMONSGAMES.COM/ASCIIPORTAL/

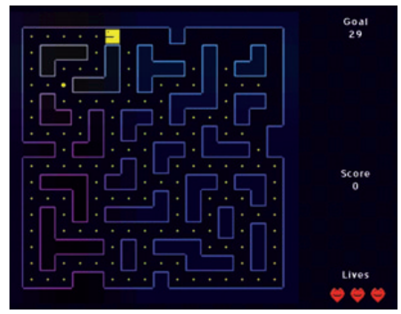
Yes, this is a version of Valve's *Portal* but drawn in ASCII characters. The game is viewed from the side and the objective is to negotiate a safe route through the various test chambers using wits, skill and some interconnected wormholes. The graphics are, of course, sparse, but with some good choices of character and colour it's still easy to tell what each object is within the game. The portals themselves are handled well, with the view through them being displayed only as far as the on-screen character's eye would be able to see from their current position. Passing from a portal on the floor to one embedded into a wall causes the screen to quickly rotate so that gravity is pointing downwards again.

ASCIIpOrtal arrives with over 50 chambers and, once introductions to the basic techniques required to get around have been made, those maps start getting seriously devious. Gamers with low frustration thresholds might want to limit themselves, playing in short bursts and carrying on where they left off each time, but a fan community has already sprung up to discuss the game and construct new levels and develop tools to make that job easier, so more challenges for long-term players are only a download away.









» **Above:** [PC] It's *Tetris* and *Pong* combined!
» **Above Right:** [PC] *Microbes* converted from the Amiga.
» **Right:** [PC] *Blockman Gets*: *Pac-Man*'s gone all square!

HOMEBREW HEROES

OUR HERO THIS MONTH IS **JAMES GAMBLE** – OR JAYENKAI TO HIS MANY FOLLOWERS – WHO RUNS AGAMEAWEEK.COM – IT WON'T COME AS A SHOCK TO ANYONE CONSIDERING THAT URL, BUT HIS AIM IS TO PRODUCE A GAME EVERY WEEK. WHAT DOES COME AS A SURPRISE IS THAT HE CAN STILL FIND TIME TO EAT, SLEEP AND TALK TO US!

Retro Gamer: The first question has to be the most obvious one: a game a week… are you insane, man!?
James Gamble: Apparently so! Lack of sleep can be daunting, but what decent programmers wouldn't agree with that?

RG: Being more serious for a moment, how did you settle on the seven-day time scale?
JG: I've tried all manner of time scales in the past. I can usually manage to hack out a pretty good game within a month, but after a while my lack of concentration usually results in me forgetting about a project. I tend to jump around a lot from game to game, and if I'm not done with a game by then, it tends to get lost along the way. A week works nicely: it's enough time to get enough into a game and have it all finished nicely.

RG: Although they're not all strictly remakes, a lot of your inspiration generally seems to come from classic games – what draws you to them?
JG: Classic games are nothing more than raw gameplay. The game's the key, and when you're aiming to do a game a week, you do tend to focus on that, as opposed to spending days drawing a lovely set of sprites that might end up in a pointless game.

Rather than remaking a particular game, though, I tend to aim towards a set of rules. Sometimes those rules very obviously fall into the gameplay of a classic game, so on those occasions I'll probably end up going for a full-on remake. I'll try not to just do plain remakes, opting to add at least something new into the mix, but occasionally there's no time to add much else.

RG: Of the games you've already released, which would be the one you're most proud of and why?
JG: One!? If I had to pick just one, it would probably be the original *Blockman* game. I'd drawn an odd square-ish *Pac-Man* character a few months earlier, but didn't want to create a standard *Pac-Man* game. Instead I decided on a platform-style game, and after adding some smaller Blocklet characters, a whole *Flicky*-style remake was created. With multiple graphic styles, plenty of levels, and even a few different bits of music, I'm quite happy that it turned out the way it did. Especially within a week!

RG: And which titles do you perhaps want to return to at some point?
JG: I'm not really sure if I'd go back to fix up a particular game, but there are many games that have the ability to store extra levels. I think if I were to look back, then I'd probably spend a couple of weeks building new levels and posting nice big updates. *RetroRaider*, particularly, would be a great game for that, especially since it's so easy to add extra backgrounds and tiles to the game.

RG: And is there anything in particular that you haven't tried to date but want to turn your hand to?
JG: I've still not done a proper racing game. They seem trickier than what I'd like to do in a week. Tracks, AI and more all seem like they'd take a little more than they could. Perhaps I should give it a go, but there's plenty of other things to keep me occupied in the meantime.

RG: Generally speaking, where do you believe the homebrew community's popularity comes from?
JG: Homebrew exists because people love to do things themselves. Whether they're staring at an Amstrad CPC's flashing yellow cursor, wondering what else they could possibly type, or they're amazed at how *GTA IV* was all put together, it's the same end result. People will always want to make games, and homebrew will always be there.

HIGH FIVE
The homebrew games James can't live without

1 Deluxe Galaga/ Warblade [Amiga/PC] Created on the Amiga and reborn on the PC. A fantastic example of what makes a great shoot-'em-up without resorting to the crazy bullet-dodging antics of modern PC shooters.

2 Super Obliterator [Amiga] Another cracking game. It's a little bit *Pang*, and a little bit *Asteroids*, while also having a nice arena to run around and hide in. The more recent PC remake includes online high scores, so you can see how badly you're playing.

3 Alex The Alligator [PC] I'm not sure why, but the crisp Game Boy stylings of *Alex 4* always bring me back for more. I'm still not very good at it, though!

4 Liero [PC] Excellent in multiplayer, *Liero* is exactly what *Worms* really should be like by now. I wonder why it still isn't?

5 SkyRoads [PC] An old DOS shareware game, but one that still gets a play every now and then. Simplistic jumping mechanics that keep you wanting more.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



» **Looking for a way to run multiple games machines on your telly? You need a lovely SCART splitter box like this one here. By lovely, we mean useful.**

SCART WOES

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Congratulations on an excellent magazine! I wouldn't normally have cause to write to you guys – reading the varied articles and catching up on much-loved games from my youth is normally good enough reason to get hold of the mag – however, something has been bugging me for a while and I'm hoping you will be able to help out. I often see the collectors featured with various game systems and a neat, well-presented room free of cables, which has baffled me. I own a couple of Mega Drives with Mega-CD, a Dreamcast and a PS2 all connected to a single TV and this has two effects. Firstly there is a mass of cables everywhere and second, and more annoyingly, when I change systems I have to change various leads to connect to the TV, which set my mind wondering if there was some kind of multiple socket/switch available for connecting several SCART cables to your TV. I've made some searches on the internet and can find nothing more advanced than an aerial input splitter, but surely there must be something available to avoid reaching round the back of the TV and changing loads of intermingled cables each time you want to change systems. Can you help solve what must be a common retro gamers' headache?

Thanks,

Baz G, Cambs

If you're running them through RGB you'll need a splitter box, Baz, which enables you to plug several SCART leads into a single SCART connector. The better ones simply allow the signal of whatever console is on at the time to bleed over the television picture, while others work using a flick switch. We'd advise you seek out the first version as they make life so much simpler, and they shouldn't be that hard to find. If you have a branch of Maplin nearby that would probably be your best bet. There's a suitable one on Maplin's website at www.maplin.co.uk/Module.aspx?ModuleNo=97941, and there were a few cheaper ones on there too.

STAR LETTER



» [Xbox 360] Steven's 17 and loves the mag. To put that into some kind of perspective for our older readers, that makes him as young as *Mortal Kombat*

SEVENTEEN AGAIN

Hey **Retro Gamer**,

I'm just writing to say thanks for putting my Retrobate profile in the magazine. I was so surprised and couldn't believe it. It was a brilliant shock. I love the magazine and enjoy writing reviews for your website. I might not be the best game reviewer in the world, but because I want to help you to make the largest retro gaming database in the world I felt I could help you by adding my favourite games. You have helped me to appreciate retro games, and to discover new games that I'd never heard of. I hope your magazine goes on forever. Being 17, it's hard for my peers to appreciate such systems as the SNES, Neo Geo and Commodore 64 like I do, but no matter how much they say the current consoles are better, I will always feel retro gaming is the best.

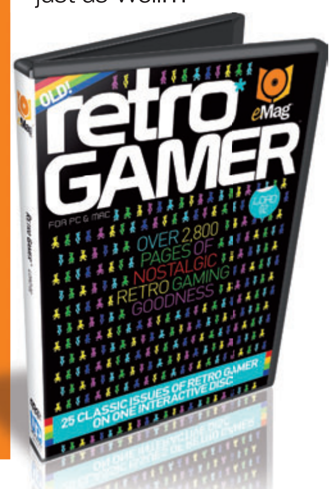
Thanks,

Steven Jackson.

Hi, Steven. It's really encouraging to hear that we have a growing following of youthful readers who are just as passionate about the magazine and retro gaming as we are. The best aspect of retro gaming is that there's a whole raft of classic games and one-of-a-kind gaming experiences just waiting to be discovered, and most at a fraction of their original price.

WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our brand new eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

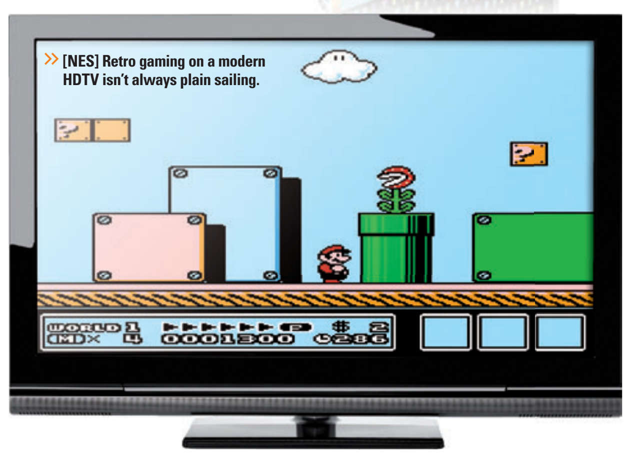


MSX: WHERE'S THE LOVE?

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

The mag is great. The wife thinks I'm mad but I'm a dedicated subscriber!

My only problem is why is there little or no content on the best Eighties format: the MSX? I am a massive MSX fan and collector but rarely see the MSX featured. Your article on all things MSX a few issues ago was great, but in terms of retro game features, they are always



» [NES] Retro gaming on a modern HDTV isn't always plain sailing.



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Next Month: John Gibson



>> BURNING QUESTION?

IF YOU HAVE a burning question, such as 'Will David Braben ever patch things up with Ian Bell?' or 'does Matthew Smith check in to hotels as Miner Willy?' then you should head straight over to our forum to post your questions to our interviewees. The best of the bunch will be answered and revealed in the next issue. To find out who we'll be interviewing in the coming months, visit the Retro Gamer forum now at www.retrogamer.net/forum

on the Speccy, C64, etc. We may be a bit mad, but there are lots of us MSX geeks out there, so come on – let's see some more MSX in this great mag!

Thanks,

KP, Yorkshire

The reason why the percentage of features swing heavily in the direction of the Speccy, C64 and CPC is chiefly because they were the most popular 8-bit micros of the day – although some do seem to forget just how popular and superlative the Amstrad was – and getting in contact with people who programmed games on those machines is easier. Leave it with us, though, and we'll see what we can do about getting more MSX in the mag.

TELEVISION QUESTION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you for a great magazine that always provides me with a good read. Even after so many years I still look forward to it arriving through my letter box – I have been a subscriber for many years. In fact, many moons ago, I met Darran – it was just when old **Retro Gamer** stopped publishing and he was editor of the retro section of **games™** – at a retro convention in Croydon. Please someone hold some more events around this part of the country instead of up north or in the Midlands.

Anyway, my retro gaming woes have made me think of an article that I think a lot of retro gamers like myself would find very useful – especially those who prefer to play on the original hardware. I think it would be great if you could clarify how we make our old retro consoles work with modern LCD TVs.

I have a number of old consoles as well as the latest gen, including a PC-Engine, Neo Geo MVS and SNES. However, since updating my games room with a 37-inch LCD 1080p TV, I have had trouble playing on some of the older consoles mentioned above, especially the PC-Engine and MVS – Saturn, PSone, N64, GC and DC are all okay. My last LCD wouldn't even display them, and my current displays an okay picture but the image flickers from time to time. I did some research on the internet and found out about some of the VGA upscalers like XRGB-2/XRGB-3, although I'm still not sure what other makes are out there and which one to get and whether they would actually do the job. I would love to see an article that explains the problem and provides some solutions. I think this is quite a technical area that a number of your readers would love to see tackled. Anyway, thanks again and I would be appreciative of a response.

Thanks,

Helal Miah

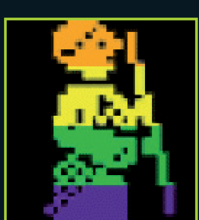
We feel your pain, Helal. Darran had a similar issue when none of his own >>



>> We'd love to run a making of *Space Manbow*. Freelancers of the world unite!.

"We may be mad, but there are lots of MSX geeks out there, so let's see some more MSX in this mag!"

RETROBATE PROFILE



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Joined:	9 November 2009
Location:	Pembrokeshire
Occupation:	Filmmaker
Website:	designconfederacy.co.uk
Fave Games System:	Sega Mega Drive



>> Subscribe to RG and this image could be waiting for you by your inglenook.

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles

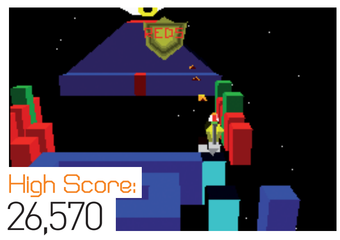


DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: I ROBOT

Why I picked it: It's just a superb game that shows how skilled Dave Theurer actually was.

Handy advice: You can't jump when the eye is open.



High Score: 26,570



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: PREHISTORIC ISLE

Why I picked it: As it combines my two favourite things in the entire world: videogames and dinosaurs.

Handy advice: Try to keep the Force-like power-up beneath your plane. It's the best firing method.



High Score: 34,500

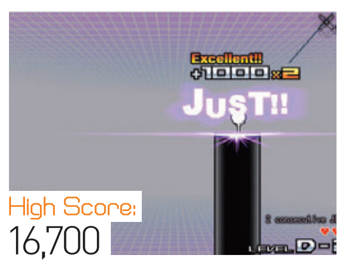


ASH

CHOSEN GAME: MR AHH!!

Why I picked it: This swing and drop score attack game is the best I've played since Monkey Target.

Handy advice: Time your swing according to wind and gravity and try to hit each centre.



High Score: 16,700

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What is your favourite Oli Frey Crash cover?

Kilb All of the covers Oli painted are fantastic. Of course, *Dun Durach* is a favourite. But seriously, the work output and turnaround from this genius is amazing.

SirClive The cyborg with *Space Invaders* on his robotic eyes is the most iconic and the one I always remember most fondly. I would advise people not to Google Oli's stuff at work, though, due to the amount of 'erotica' that he has done!

Morkin It has to be issue 12, Christmas Special 1984/85 without a doubt. I absolutely love that cover and every year around now I get my copy out of the loft for a readthrough and to admire that artwork. Truly magical.

thevulture As a C64 owner, I missed out on a lot of superb *Crash* covers. Gutted, as I'm a huge fan of Oli's work. One I remember the most as it had the most fuss made over it at the time is, of course, issue 41? *Barbarian*. Looked superb, but oh my life, you'd think it was the downfall of humanity judging by the letters at the time.

jdanddiet Oooh, so many to choose from. I remember the *Top Gun* one was pretty spiffing, but I think I'm going to go with *Barbarian* as well simply for the hilarious anger it spawned.

paranoid marvin I thought the Christmas cover he did for **RG** was pretty neat, but issue 2 for me. *Kong*, a scantily clad woman, and a half-eaten rubber-keyed Spectrum. What's not to like?

jdanddiet If we're going on scantily clad women, the dark-haired dominatrix on issue 18 was pretty special.

paranoid marvin Personally I think his better work was with *Zzap!*. *Beach Head II* and *Leaderboard* covers were awesome. I think my favourite Christmas special was 36, with Cloughie dressed as Santa popping his head round the corner, while the gang are playing *Football Fortunes*.

mrspud None of them. I was an avid *YS* reader instead

sirclive1 I've got two favourites: issue 9, the superb *Ziggy*/*Backpackers* cover – it's just stunning – and not long after that gem was the fabulous issue 11 cover with the *Dungeons & Dragons*-style warriors fighting – and it's my favourite issue – but I'm gonna go with issue 9. It's the detail in the suit and the flame; it's perfection

Dan Hero The cover of issue 35 was top notch; that snake was too awesome for words. *Cobra* on the Spectrum was nice, too, by the way.

Naitch *Crash* really did have some cool covers! My favourites would be the Spectrum cover from February 1985, *Everyone's A Wally* from March 1985, *Jack The Nipper* from July 1986 and *NARC* from December 1990.

Bub&Bob Being a *Zzap!* man, I wouldn't know any *Crash* covers and can't be bothered to find any. However, being that its Oli we are talking about then I would say all of them!!

Smurph I'd go with the *LED Storm* cover from issue 61. It really made me want the game; it looked so cool.

the_hawk The one that springs to mind is one of the early ones where *Kong* is taking a bite out of an oversized Speccy while a girl looks on in horror. I also liked the one with the alien with Spectrums for eyes and lights coming through the keys. I guess I've just got a thing for big monsters and Spectrum 48Ks.

Sputryk Issue 20 will always be remembered as it was the first issue I bought, even before owning a Speccy. However, my vote has to go to issue 31 and the raunchy images of mud-fighting with Hannah Smith.

TheDude18 The Game Over artwork. Oops! Just realised the question was for his *Crash* artwork. In that case it would be the *Flying Shark* cover.

Beakerzoid If I had to narrow it down, I would include issue 37. *Top Gun*: crap film, crap game, but fighter jets... yay! Issue 49 – biplanes, yup; I got a thing for flying machines – issue 79 (*Gladiator*), and issue 27. Out of all his space-based ones, that one always stands out to me due to the creative melding of a 128K with a spaceship.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

SF III: OVERRATED?

ShadowMan I do think it being hailed as the god of all fighters is a bit extreme. I never did connect with it the same way I did with *SF II* and *Alpha 3*. The parrying was hard and I ended up playing far more *MVC2* and *CVS2*.

BornToEnd *3rd Strike* is everything that *IV* should have been and more. The game could be carried just on its style; it oozes style. The balancing is so perfect as well... well, apart from... REEEESSSSSS-UUUUURRRRRRR-EECCCTTIOONNNNNNNNNNN. The game's one sour point. So very, very cheap.

HEAVYface Didn't like *3rd Strike*. It was uglier than the previous versions and the expanded roster was filled with second-rate clones.

ESSENTIAL GAMES

harlequ1n I think everyone, regardless of age, genre or preference, should experience *Sid Meier's Civilization* or *Civ 2* if possible, as those games really made me think and strengthened my underdeveloped brain as a lad. Your turn.

rossi46 Mega Drive: *Vectorman*, *Alisia Dragoon*, *Gynoug*, *Ranger X*, *Mazin War* and *Thunder Force IV*. The pinnacle of the Nineties 16-bit era.

Graedient *Chrono Trigger*. I wasn't a fan of RPGs until I played that. Amazing, amazing, amazing. I'll have to buy another copy and play through it again.

lostSUNDAY Hmm, hard. I guess one should be *Super Mario Bros*. For a person that is totally unfamiliar with videogames, *SMB* really delivers the fundamentals of a whole genre. Same thing with *Tetris*. Boring answers, but true nonetheless.

EASY GAMES

Andykiwi I'm sure we have all found games that were too hard for one reason or another, but have you come across any games you found to be too easy and therefore no fun?

lostSUNDAY *Phantasmagoria* on the PC. Been a few years since I played it, but I remember it as very easy. And scary.

coevin There are a couple that spring to mind. *Rambo* C64, *Ghostbusters* C64, *Golden Axe* C64 – completed first go. *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy. Games these days are all generally easy, and that's why I added only old-school games

ShadowMan *Mega Man 5* was too easy compared to the rest of the series while also giving out extra lives at an alarming rate. Still a blast to play through, though. I just wish it was harder!

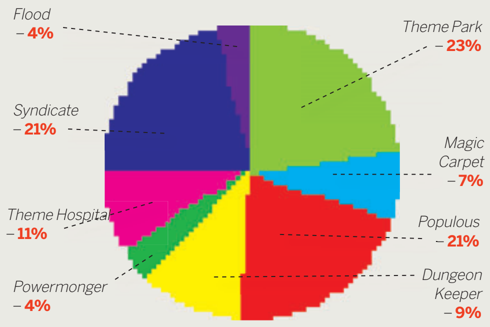
OLD VS NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *After Burner* is your favourite?

After Burner II	After Burner Climax
	
55%	45%
SpifferRabbit *After Burner II* is the only way to fly!	**Smurph** *After Burner Climax*, easily – it did exactly what it says on the tin

HOT TOPIC

Best Bullfrog game



"*Syndicate*. But only the Amiga/PC/Jaguar versions. The MD/SNES versions just don't sit right with me" **– thevulture**

"Some great games, but for sheer atmosphere *Powermonger* gets my vote" **– paranoid marvin**

"*Populous*, although I thought *Populous II* was even better. Two all-time classics" **– HalcyonDaze00**

consoles would work on his 50-inch Samsung without a very expensive upscaler. This was rectified when he moved over to a plasma TV, but there's nevertheless a big issue with newer TVs not displaying lower resolutions properly. We could certainly look into a feature, but without checking every single make of television it would prove quite tricky. If any readers are thinking of upgrading their TVs, we'd suggest you try out your machines on them first in your local shop to avoid any potential disappointments.

SUBS OF THE PATRIOTS

Hey guys,

You probably get this a lot. I recently bought a copy of your magazine at a newsstand here in Arizona. Well, they stopped carrying the magazine and I'm mad now. I was wondering if you guys ever had any intention of importing the magazine here to the US.

Thanks!

Brian

Retro Gamer still ships to the US, Brian, and should be readily available in all good branches of Barnes & Noble. If you're struggling to find the magazine, though, another option could be to take out a subscription. It works out cheaper, and the magazine is conveniently deposited down your chimney each month by Darran in a Mario costume – or possibly not – and you also get the latest issue faster than it hits the shops. US readers can currently subscribe to 13 issues for just $80 by visiting www.imaginesubs.co.uk/RET and quoting 'USA'.

COLLECTOR'S MOURNER

Hi Darran!

I must first thank you for a great magazine! I live in Sweden and am so glad that Imagine can ship it over here!

The thing I wanted to ask you was about the Collector's Corner in the mag. I think this little section is great! It's a way for the readers and collectors to show off their collection and to get connected in a fun way, but I'm very surprised to see that the section is so small. Why? I would like to see it have a full page, larger photos and a little interview. Or maybe just some standard questions that the collectors always have to answer. For example, if the person is a C64 collector, the questions would be something like: When did you start collecting C64? Why C64? What can we find in your collection? What is your favourite piece in your collection? That would be great! So what do you think?

Thanks!

Johan

The reason we curtailed it from two pages to a half page was to free up more pages for features and extend other sections during the magazine's redesign. It's a great point you raise, though, Johan, but at the moment there are no plans to change the way we currently cover Collector's Corner. That's not to say it's something we might not look at in the future, though.



[MSX] KP wanted some more MSX, so here's an extra screenshot of *Jet Set Willy*. We'll try to get some more in properly, though. Honest!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

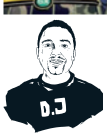
Modern Warfare 2

Darran paid £32 for *Modern Warfare*, Stuart was one of those annoying sods who managed to bag a copy for £26, and Steve is still holding on to some misguided hope that Activision is going to send us a free promo copy of the game and is going to get a copy for nothing. Judging by the squillion or so units the game has already sold, it appears that Steve could be the only 360 owner on the planet who doesn't actually own a copy of the game. Well done, Steve, you cotton-headed ninny-muggings – he actually thinks he's going to get a promo copy working on a retro mag!

> "I think Collector's Corner is great! It's a way for the readers and collectors to show off their collection"

CURRENTLY PLAYING

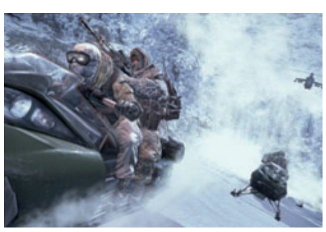




DARRAN

The Beatles: Rock Band

I'm still in love with this game and the fact that *Abbey Road* has been released makes the experience even sweeter. Basically I don't go to bed until I've played the *Abbey Road* medley and sung along to it.

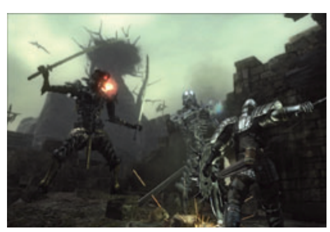




STUART

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

This month I've been working my way through *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, although it didn't take me long. I got sucked into the hype machine and have the battle scars to prove it.





ASH

Demon's Souls

This is the best action-RPG I've ever played, believe me. And don't be fooled by the next-gen graphics. It's as old-school in its learning curve as *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, only far more rewarding.

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Special Thanks
The Classic Game Room for their excellent review. Check it out at www.youtube.com/user/InecomCompany

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DRIVER

Burning rubber with videogames' most infamous wheelman

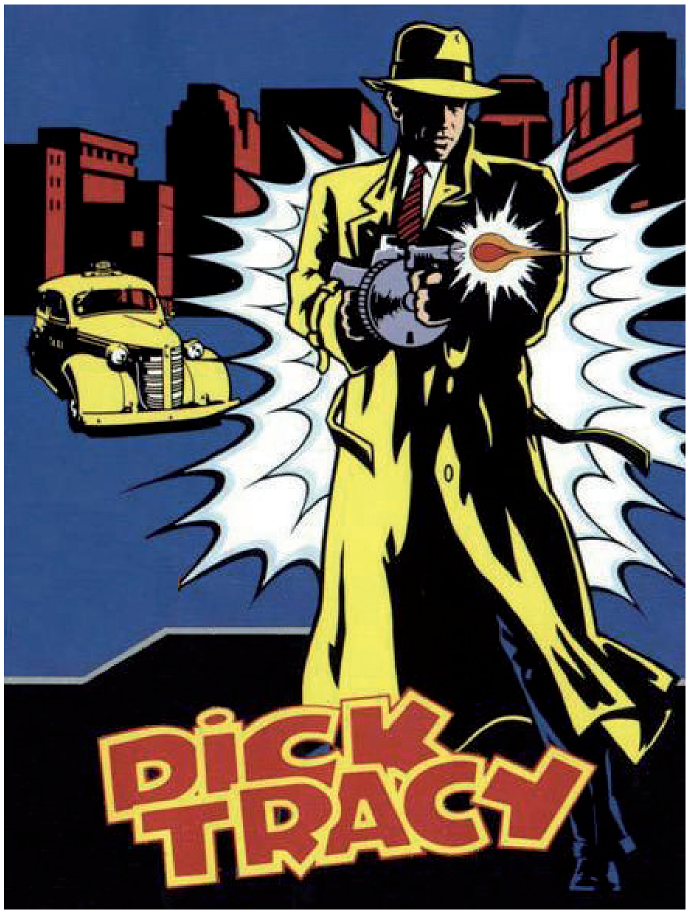


OTHER EXCITING FEATURES

- Everyone remembers *Starquake* and *Wizard's Lair*, but whatever happened to creator Steve Crow? Prepare to find out
- We take a look at Sinclair's ZX80, the home computer responsible for launching the careers of many famous developers
- Imagine's conversion of *Nemesis* looked astonishing… In screenshots. The developer explains what really happened

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE 07 JANUARY 2010

LOAD 72



DICK TRACY

Dick Tracy is probably the only man in the world who can pull off a banana yellow suit – well, apart from maybe Bananaman. Anyway, sadly, as this is the Game Boy version of the game, you can't really tell. You'll simply have to take our word for it. Here's this month's End/Game



SCREEN 1
After a heroic gun battle with Al 'Big Boy' Caprice, Tracy grabs the collar of the mob boss and Caprice pees his spats for fear of a good roughing up.



SCREEN 2
Tracy punches him hard and Caprice falls into the cold, dark monochrome drink while saying 'A' quite a lot. That Dick is one hard canary yellow cookie.



SCREEN 3
More of the same shot here with nothing to really comment about, except the As become spaced further apart and Caprice edges closer to the water.



SCREEN 4
In typical Tracy style, do our hero and his girl ride off into the sunset to get hitched? Nope. Start a family? Get jiggy with it? Nope. Eat some chilli. Jerks.



SCREEN 5
We've nothing really to say about this shot. It's nicely drawn, we like the use of shading and the image is nicely framed. Oh, and great choice for the text font too.